

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

BY F. ST. MARS





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PEOPLE OF THE WILD



COAL DEVILS, ON A COAL TREE, PERFORMING CONTORTIONS ABOVE A CLIFF
OF COAL—ALL IN SILHOUETTE AGAINST A SILENTLY RAGING FURNACE.

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

BY
F. ST. MARS

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A BRIGAND OF THE WILD

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“ For things we never mention,
For art misunderstood—
For excellent intention
That did not turn to good,
For ancient tales renewing
From clouds we could not clear—
Beyond the Laws pursuing
We fled and settled here.”

Rudyard Kipling.

WHEN you have systematically defied all authority for two seasons; broken every law, written or unwritten (which are the most binding) ; wiped up one-third of the contents of the pheasant and partridge nests on three of the most strictly preserved estates in England so that the united efforts of thirty broody hens setting night and day on four hundred costly eggs will not repair the damage; spirited quite one hundred nestlings into nowhere and upset the housekeeping arrangements

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of twenty-five per cent. of your neighbors for a radius of ten miles, you may or you may not expect consideration. You will certainly not get it.

Downy One had done all these things that we know of, and a good few more that we do not, and now that he wished to nest himself in peace, he found that he was far more likely to rest in pieces.

Fate and the ways of his ancestors had made him a brigand. Nature had given him a garb like the quarterings of an heraldic shield, or a pied piper. He found no fault with the shortcomings of his ancestors, but he would have cursed Nature every day of his life if he had known who was responsible for the silly mistake.

When you are arrayed in a coat of that metallic black which looks green in a half-a-dozen lights, when that coat is slashed broadly with white of the purest, and the whole get-up is set off with an abnormally long, green-black, wedge-shaped tail, you look very pretty indeed, not to say handsome, but it does not help you to carry on

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the ancient profession of brigandage without attracting unhealthy attention.

Downy One was thus uniformed. He had a black, hammer-like beak, strong black legs and claws, a black heart, a length of nineteen and one-eighth inches, and a saving sense of mischievous humor—an elfin touch that excused many unhallowed deeds and evil ways of living. In a word, he was a magpie. No flies settled upon Downy One, nor did he let spider's web or mildew grow round his ideas. He pushed them along.

All birds *live* in the strictest sense of the word, but I have never known a bird so cram full of life in all my days. He oozed life at every feather. There must have been enough electricity in his being to run a sixteen candle power electric light for twelve hours out of the twenty-four. "Go" with him was the religion, and he gave every average Englishman who watched him for half an hour the jumps. He had no repose in his make-up. If he had lived in the U. S. A. he would have

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figured as the national emblem. In England he was not understood. In short, he was a "live proposition."

The Downy One and his wife—for even a brigand must own a wife in the wild—had been trying to nest for weeks. It was the time of year when the branches haze with green and this particular form of madness takes birds in the windpipe, or the heart, or both, but mostly in the windpipe, I think. I say "trying to" advisedly, for their first nest in a tree had been laboriously hacked to pieces by a gamekeeper; the second, also in a tree, had been blown to fine dust by many charges of number five shot, and they were now seeking a place for the forlorn hope.

They flew about all day long nosing—beaking would perhaps be more correct—into every possible and impossible place, much to the scandal of other birds who had already taken up house-lots therein. By the time they had scoured all the woods for fifteen miles and had set all the wood-pigeons and half the turtle doves in a state bordering upon nervous prostration—for if

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they could not nest themselves they would not let anybody else nest—they were ready to nest upon the ground itself.

Then they discovered Ghost Tower.

If you do not know Ghost Tower you will be able only dimly to picture it. It stood in the heart of a wood on the top of a seventy-foot cliff overlooking a swift and lawless river. No man entered it by day because it had lately decanted its innards, much to the astonishment and hurt of a picnic party, and no living man or woman would enter it by night because it was haunted. So it was, but not by ghosts. It had once been a castle and was now a shell, with a shadow of a keep, leaning drunkenly.

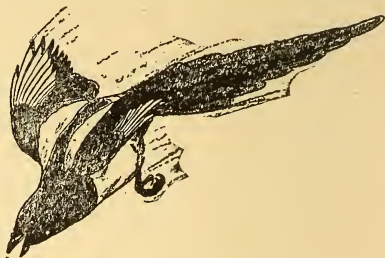
The Downy One discovered a great hollow tree growing up within the tower, and having dislodged four blackbirds, one red-backed shrike, and two kestrels therefrom, decided there to build. Built they then a castle of their own, a fastness within a fastness, inside a fastness. As if the tower was not enough, and the pestilential *chevaux-de-frise* of a holly tree was not sufficient, they

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must needs construct a fortress. That is instinct; like the machinery of State, circumstances make no difference to it. Magpies had always built that way—enough.

My, how he worked! for the building operations fell solely upon Downy One. His mate looked on. She had nothing to do with manual labor, which is as it should be. They were late. Mrs. Downy One said so, and she ought to know. First was a foundation of clay and turf, hard rammed in. Next followed walls of sticks—carefully tested sticks. Next a lining of soft and tender young roots. Next an inner lining of silky grass, and finally, if you please, a dome, a most military dome, of the most pestilentially thorny, spiked, and clawed tendrils and sticks it was possible to pick up in a day's march.

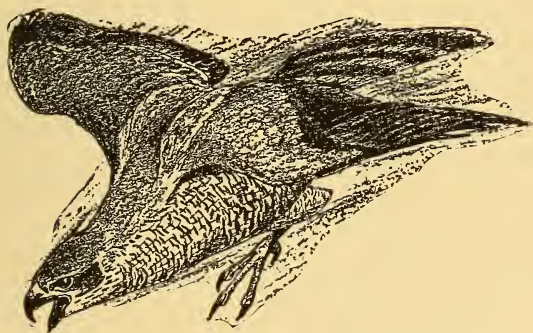
Mrs. Downy One, sitting inside,



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with her beak—her most suggestive beak—partly covering the only entrance, allowed that it was good. So it was. It was impregnable. Even the crow and the rook, the jay and the jackdaw—all near relations, therefore secret foes, of the Downy One—could not steal eggs from there. And more especially man would not come to discover it.

After all was over Downy One sat on the



A BIG, SLASHING GOSHAWK MADE A SHIFT TO
STOOP AT HIM

bough of a dark and frowning juniper, sunk his head between his shoulders, and shut one eye. There is a tradition among the wild

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folk of those parts that the other eye was never closed. I cannot vouch for this, however. Anyway, this was what he called going to sleep.

The wren that said it was time to get up awoke him at three-forty with a sudden jerky tinkle, but it was not till the first thrush began repeating over and over again some new verse which he must have thought out in the night that the first cold gray haze reflected in steel upon the leaves. That was at three-forty-eight, and on the stroke of four a lark leaped up to meet the burnished sun, whose heralds—great, glowing, gold and saffron waves—came leaping from height to height and from massed tree regiment to tree regiment.

Suddenly, as if gates had been flung open, a gold and flaming burst of the eastern mists, and as though an unseen conductor had waved an invisible baton, the whole world of green boughs, shade, shadow, thicket, wood, and cover awoke in a drowning clash of massed music playing in the trampling, noisy, busy day.

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Downy One arose, shook himself, gave a look in at his wife—motionless as a granite carving—and fled to join in the general wild scramble for breakfast.

The Downy One lumbered in his flight, lumbered heavily, as if to fly were to him labor unspeakable. His long tail trailed behind. His wings—short and somewhat rounded—made quick, spasmodic flappings. Sometimes, between whiles, he looped, on still wings. The sunlight played in purple, green, and shot gold burnishings on the end of his long, stepped tail. And a big, slashing goshawk made shift to stoop at him as he flew.

Downy One heard, and knew all about, the hissing wings of the slayer. If he increased his speed he did not appear to. He merely said “Chazurk-chazurk-chazurk,” very quickly. And the amazed hawk hit the end of his tail and nearly hit the end of his own life on the ground below before he could check impetus.

That was probably what the long tail was for. It may have struck human beings for

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the first time; it certainly did the hawk. In motion one is apt to let the eye follow the tail rather than the body. Given then a speed much greater than it looks, one is in aiming—firing and pouncing—far more likely to hit the tail than the body.

Downy One knew all about this, but he knew also, that, being a goshawk, this particular hunter would give chase. It did; like a brown streak it recovered and projected after Downy One at appalling speed. If the wood was very near, so was the hawk—a foot behind, it may be, certainly not more.

Downy One cast one eye backwards. He was going to execute some tricky maneuvering, and, since he was playing with hundredths of an inch and fiftieths of a second for margin, a game all his own, it behooved him to keep his eyes skinned and mind what he was about.

When the hawk had gained so much that its beak lay level with the root of Downy One's tail, it gathered itself together for the final rush that should, if it got home, relieve

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the magpie of all further worry in this life. It stiffened. It tightened its wings. It drew itself in and slightly quickened and shortened its wing-stroke, as a horse shortens and quickens its stride when about to take a fence.

Then it sprang—if the term be allowed to describe the movements of a bird in flight—forward!

At the same instant Downy One dived miraculously down to the low, overhanging boughs that bordered a wood, for which wood he had been making. There was no pause, no hesitation, between the dive down, the shoot under, the instant throwing open and down of the great tail fanwise, the almost stunning consequent dead stop in full career, in less than half the bird's length, and the still more instant shoot up—for the tail prevented the impetus expending itself in any other direction—inside the hanging, leafy curtain to the very heart of the cover. Thus, in effect, he executed a V in the air, the hanging, trailing boughs filling the inside of the letter.

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Every species in the wild perfects some little trick of chase or evasion which shall save their lives in time of need. It is their very own, their patent, their sheet anchor to windward. Usually it takes a few thousand years to perfect, and even then it is never so perfect that some member or other, engaged in what Darwin calls variation, which is experimenting, has not worked out an improvement. This trick of Downy One's described above is the sole property of the magpies, who are the patentees. The long tail is one part of its machinery; the short rounded wings another. The black-birds, and they only in quite a small way, are the only other birds which use the same trick.

What followed was rather vivid. The hawk found himself suddenly alone, but that was the least of the surprise. He discovered that he was looking into an impenetrable wall of foliage—instead of a magpie's back; that he was going at not less than sixty miles an hour, and that he had one yard of margin in which to stop himself

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dead, or—be stopped dead, and that quite literally.

He did not stop. With everything sacrificed to speed and armament he had no dexterity in this cramped warfare. The tail was long but not long enough; the brakes were insufficient. The result, therefore, was none the less appalling from being expected.

Wildly wings and spread tail were flung out, the body thrown clean up into a horizontal position, the great clutching talons thrust out ahead. At twenty miles an hour the hawk crashed into the still shadow of the leaves, scattering amazed small birds right and left in the process, and vanished. He never came out again.

Downy One, seated on a main bough, placidly and as if nothing had happened, heard the crash and the splintering of wings. His head jerked round in time to see the hawk driving helplessly into the network and darkness, to see and hear him hit a larger branch with a soft thud and fall, bounding this way and that, to earth, leav-

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ing a trail of feathers behind him, like the tail of a comet.

“Chazurk,” cried Downy One, fanning up his tail and peering impishly down at the fallen foe. Then he slid quietly to the ground and breakfasted to his heart’s content—on hawk.

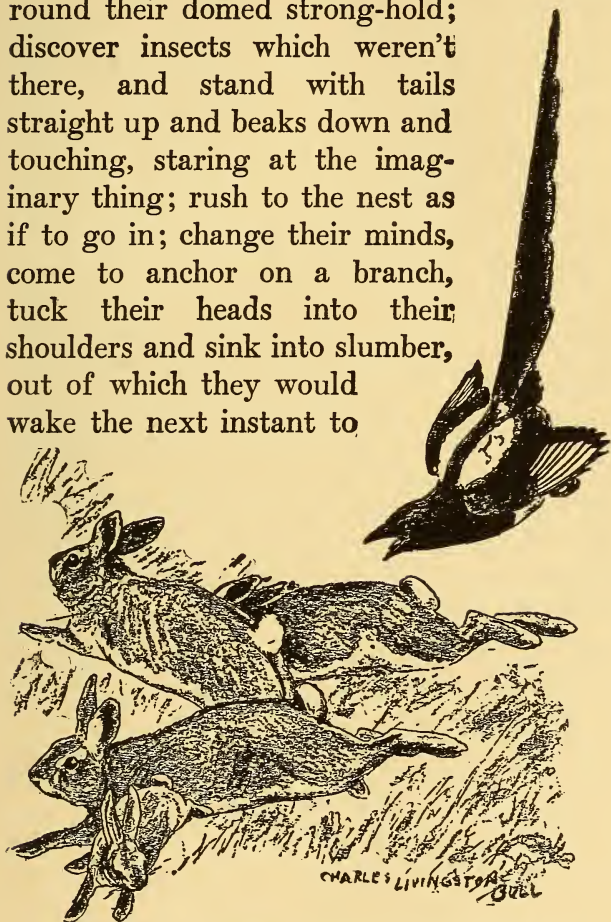
It was fully midday before the hen magpie heard that well known cry like unto the bleating of a goat and saw the mischievous Downy One, a checkered form looming through the checkered shades.

She came out of the nest and fanned her tail. He alighted beside her, bowed, and fanned his tail like a blackbird. Then into the nest she ran. She had discovered something apparently, and he followed. Then they put their heads and beaks together and examined with a great show of amazement the egg—their egg—which lay there, just as if they did not both know that that pale green, gray-flecked treasure had been there when they woke up.

Thereafter they must needs hunt one another’s long burnished tails round and

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round their domed strong-hold;
discover insects which weren't
there, and stand with tails
straight up and beaks down and
touching, staring at the imag-
inary thing; rush to the nest as
if to go in; change their minds,
come to anchor on a branch,
tuck their heads into their
shoulders and sink into slumber,
out of which they would
wake the next instant to



FALL WITH A SCREECH THAT WOULD DO ANY
GHOST PROUD AMONG SOME FEEDING RABBITS

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fall with a screech that would do any ghost proud among some feeding rabbits and dance up and down with evil joy because the rabbits jumped nearly two feet, or fell backwards into their hole with fright.

Anon Mrs. Downy One retired to replenish the commissariat and he mounted guard. He knew that every egg meant an added danger. Many took an interest in them now who before had passed on the other side, as it were. On the principle, however, of setting a thief to catch a thief, Mrs. Downy One had no anxiety in leaving her husband in charge. He feared no man, God he did not know, and the devil he regarded not at all. He was, moreover, an inch longer and stronger than his wife, and an inch to these parties means much.

Once a jackdaw, who lived on the top stone step within the tower, flew down to the holly tree. He was silent, and when the vociferous jackdaw holds his tongue evil is afoot. Downy One could see the white eye of the bird plainly between the prickles, but the eye could not see him. Presently the

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rigid leaves parted and Jack poked his head partly into the entrance of the magpie's nest to inspect. Then he went away. I don't know where he went, nor does Downy One. He did not return. He had felt not gently the business of the magpie's beak.

Gradually evening stalked over the silent trees. It was an unpleasant evening, dead, dreary, and demoralizing, leaden and lugubrious. A fitful rain hunted panicky gusts of wind across the country, and the centuries-old ivy, the prickles of the holly, and the long, low fingers of a cedar made uncanny rustlings against the gray walls that had sheltered kings.

Downy One knew nothing, however, of sentiment or of association. He might have sat in a workhouse hedge as in that nest within that tower, surrounded by "Gray recumbent tombs of the dead, in deserted places."

The curse of imagination was not his, yet he started—started and dropped his head low, his beak held straight for the center of the spiked portals of his home, poised like

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a lance at rest, and the ancient stones without were no more still than he.

He had heard a voice—that is nothing. No. Go you, however, and hear it in Ghost Tower, a wandering voice without apparent maker, a strangely unearthly, hollow, infinitely cruel sighing, as of some soul seeking for it knew not what—the voice of the ghosts of the place.

The voice kept on—sighing, sighing, sighing. Downy One's experience taught him that voices have a maker and that if one "freezes" long enough the maker will show itself. He "froze" accordingly, and the voice and the minutes went on together.

By the time the huge, yellow, gently surprised moon had heaved itself clear of the woods and the retreating rain-clouds and the last blackbird had scolded himself to sleep, Downy One had passed through every possible phase of fear and was beginning to get back to his normal self again. Far away he heard a sound as of a goat bleating. It was his wife. She would expect him to send out a welcoming answer on her return.

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He sat still, however; he did not dare interrupt the voice, but he was very much wondering what would happen when his mate turned up.

Suddenly she appeared, a hurried, beating, checkered streak among the trees. He could plainly hear the rustle of her wings. But the huge shadow that detached itself from out the cavern of the blue-gray shadow beneath a cedar made no sound at all as it flew. Downy One had seen cats before, but never a cat on wings; a thing with huge eyes that shone and wings which were silent was beyond his calculations.

During the seconds that followed Ghost Tower well upheld its reputation. A man, a laborer, passing a hundred yards away, jumped round, gave one horrified stare, and removed himself at high speed. He has assured me since that he was not frightened. He only wished to get home quickly because his supper might be waiting for him. That was why he ran.

The shadowy half light within the shell of the keep seemed full of bodies, permeated

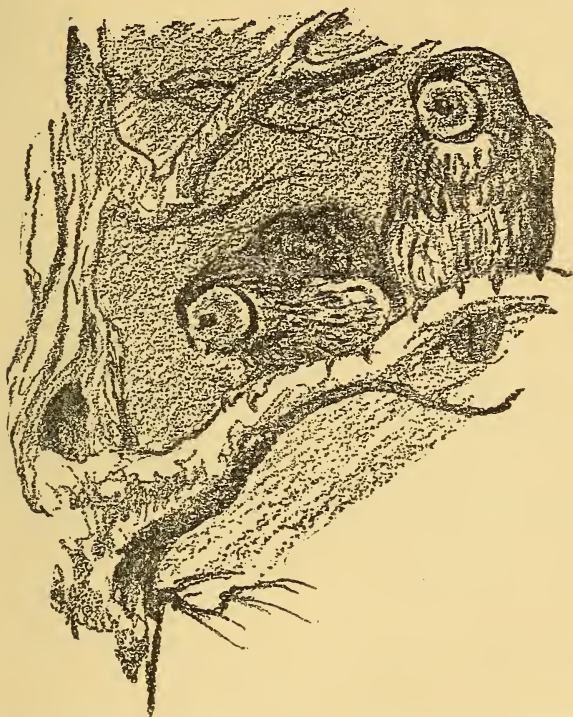
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with bodies, playing a mad and delirious game of rounders. I do not know how many bodies there were; there seemed to be hundreds. I cannot bring myself to believe that there were only three. Also there was, or appeared to be, at least a massed choir of lost souls sighing in chorus, and not less than a flock of goats all bleating at once. Downy One assures me, however, that there was only his wife, a tawny owl, and himself, and he ought to know.

It was quite a fluke that enabled him to catch the tawny owl a vicious crack on the head with his long, black, straight, and murderous beak. The stroke allowed the magpies six seconds to regain their fortress while the owl extricated himself from a mass of ivy with which he had collided after the blow. They did it. They had to. Death was at the end of that six seconds.

Then, for the rest of that night the tawny owls, for there were two of them, maintained a hissing, snoring, sighing, hooting siege of the domed nest, while the magpies sat inside and yelled obscene replies through

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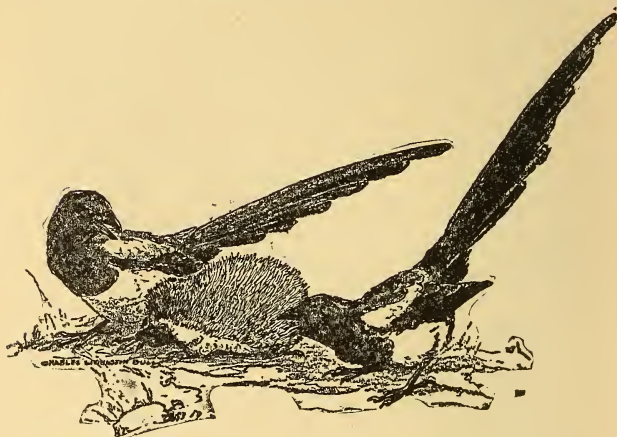
MAINTAINED A HISSING, SNORING, SIGHING SIEGE
OF THE NEST

the small—most fortunately small—entrance.

With the first ringing song-thrush note of dawn the owls vanished suddenly and

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utterly. It was as if the flute-like call had been a signal. Downy One waited for half an hour, while the tree-trunks facing east silvered with gray, turned to pink, to red,



SO SERIOUSLY ANNOY A BELATED HEDGEHOG THAT
IT WAS FORCED TO ROLL ITSELF INTO A
PROTESTING BALL

and to amber; till a golden beam shot down quite suddenly and lit up a thousand glittering jewels of dew strung on the grass stems within the keep. Then he came out of the nest and mocked the singer with hootings and sighings which he had picked up in the

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night watches, so that the thrush fled precipitantly and two blackbirds and a horde of smaller fry—chaffinches, greenfinches, hedgesparrows, and the like—came bustling up to know who said “Owls!”

After that his mate must needs let forth a wild squawk, and he must dive into the nest to view the second egg, and they must both join beaks and stare at it as if they had never seen such a thing in all their lives, and Downy One must rush out and pretend he had discovered another egg—or something equally exciting—on the bare grass, and down must flop his mate, and the beak to beak stare—always with their long tails stuck up in the air—had to be gone through all over again.

This they broke off to quarrel violently, and chase tails round and round, and dash at a turtle dove with a torrent of invective that nearly choked that gentle bird out of its five senses, and fall upon and so seriously annoy a belated hedgehog that it was forced to roll itself into a protesting ball. Finally the hen-bird slipped back to her eggs, silent

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as a shadow, and Downy One slipped away —also after the admitted habit of shadows —to—other people's eggs.

He dived his slow, flapping way through the echoing woods, all throbbing with the songs of nesting birds, the good, brown pungent damp earth-smell in his nostrils.

If he left cover it was only for a quick dive across some small field. Not that he loved cover for itself. He was no bird of the woods, but of the oak forests, where, each tree claiming an area of its own, were great sunlit spaces full of life and sun and color.

Anon he came to a stream, swift, clear, and irresponsible. Alders flanked it. A kingfisher made an emerald and furnace-red splash against the twinkling pebbles of its bed, and half-guessed wavy streaks played with the speed of forked lightning in its shallows. One might, if one was sufficiently smart, stop one of those streaks. Downy One saw the jeweled wonder in mid-stream do so, and saw, too, that the streak had in that case turned into a young trout.

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Now Downy One held that what other birds could do that thing was possible to him also, and as regards their least honest attainments he had frequently proved his boast. I have never seen him copy any of the better qualities, however, except their song. But he did not know that he had far better steal a bar of beaten silver than steal the living counterpart of the same, a trout; was unaware that he who goes trout fishing without written permit does so at the risk of his head; and did not realize that though the keepers who serve pheasants are one horror, the guardians of the finny game are another and much worse calamity. All these small items he found out later.

The peculiarity of trout is like the peculiarity of quick-silver; when you touch them they are not there, if you comprehend my meaning. At first he thought there were no trout. Then he discovered that he was surrounded by them; all lying head to stream, all motionless save for the ceaseless tremor of the ends of their tails, all assimilating so exactly with the bottom, as a trout

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alone can, that they looked, for all their bulk, like lines.

Downy One jabbed at them. He who made his living by the certainty of his aim—as much as by the somewhat low cunning of his brain—was quite sure that he judged his stroke true. Yet there was never a trout there. At the fifth stroke he learned wisdom, and a gleaming bar of silver was flung high and dry on the bank of young green, against which it made a charming picture if he had only known it.

He had just finished his fishy meal when it seemed as though the end of a torch had been whisked past him with incredible swiftness down stream. A snap of some twig being trodden upon gave Downy One all the reason he required for this retreat, and without waiting to look—he who waits to look in the wild is dead—he fled. A burst as of thunder followed; a puff of dust where he had been on the bank followed that; a vile rush of language came after, and Downy One, from the nearest cover, watched a water bailiff appear with the language.

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Downy One had by this time come to the conclusion that streams held far more interest than he had hitherto imagined. They harbored cover; the bunchy willows and tas-



WHERE BLACK MOORHENS AND GRAY-BLACK COOTS JERKED THEIR WAY OVER THE UNRUFFLED SURFACE
selled withy beds were ideal cover. They held a wealth of life of their own. They were a favorite nesting haunt of a dozen forms of feathered populace. He had, he considered, not even begun to "connote"

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the new world, so different from the world of his woods and cattle-trampled fields.

He would inspect further. He did, and it ended in a great still lake, a sheet of glass, painted — smudged rather — with green, where water-lilies would presently float like white and yellow moons, where black moorhens and gray black coots jerked their way perpetually over the unruffled surface, and where, save for the “blob” of a piratical pike and the ceaseless churring of the grasshopper warblers among the reeds sounding like an everlasting winding of unseen fisherman’s reels, silence had everything her own way.

At least, so Downy One thought. Then a great, gray, impressive shadow passed overhead and something squawked, a metallic, rasping squawk, and Downy One looked up to behold his first heronry. He saw huge flap-winged birds beating in or beating out from trees that looked like green watch-towers on an island, so tall were they; still, straight, giant birds perched on the tops of those trees and vast platform nests that

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would have formed a foundation for half a dozen of his own.

At first he "froze"—the shadows looked so ominous. But it is impossible for a magpie to remain frightened for very long at a time. His sense of humor gets the better of him, and he wants to find out, or has found out and breaks cover with a derisive laugh. Downy One instantly connected those nests with eggs. Of course he would do that. It was just like his insolence.

Seeing that his length—tail and all—could not squeeze out to more than nineteen and a half inches, and the length of the herons was anything you please round about three feet, the insolence was not small. What if he could?—but there!—the idea was too mad to be thought of. As if any idea was too mad for a magpie to think of—always presuming that it savored of mischief of course.

Downy One occupied the next many minutes in working up one of the thickest of the high trees without being seen. At the end of an hour he had gained a height of

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unknown feet, and, as the guide book says, "an excellent panoramic view." My, what nests! Flight, feathers, and claws, what eggs! The nearest nest to him held five, green or blue, blue or green, or both, he could hardly say which, with no other markings. But the size!—why!—they were two and a half inches long. What a feed!

What devil of mischance prompted the hen heron in the nearest nest to Downy One to get up at that moment and remove half-a-mile in order to stretch her legs and feed is not known. It was unfortunate, of course, but equally of course, how was she to know?

Downy One saw the five great green—they looked now the color of pale green water—eggs left unguarded, and the curse of his race, the fiend that dogs the footsteps and the wing-flaps of all the crows, whispered in his ear "Steal."

And he stole!

What happened in those few delirious seconds Downy One could never say. The cock-heron—or whatever they call the male of the species—must have been letting him-

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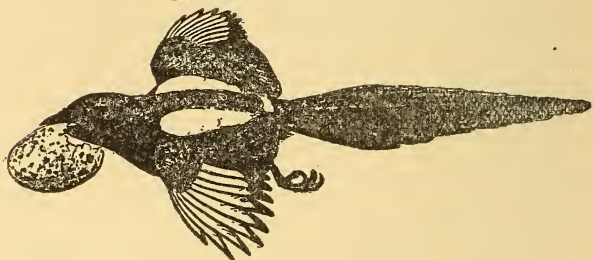


SOMETHING WHIZZED WITHIN A QUARTER OF AN
INCH OF HIS LEFT EYE

self down out of the sky on his return from feeding. At least, Downy One gained the nest coincident with a great shadow. The grating "C-r-r-a-r-k" was not needed to tell him who spoke. He knew and there was no necessity to look up.

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He pickaxed an egg and fell backwards. Something—it might have been a spear for aught he knew, though common-sense compels us to admit that it was the heron's javelin-like beak—whizzed within a quarter of an inch of his left eye and impaled itself clean through the nest, and Downy One broke for the great green sea of cover that stretched far below as he had never fled in his life before. This was much worse than



DOWNY ONE ARRIVED AT THE GHOST TOWER, THE
EGG STILL ON HIS BEAK

any keepers' guns, this instantaneous lunge of spear-like beak that he knew would transfix him like a mouse on a skewer if he waited.

Downy One arrived at the Ghost Tower in an ecstasy of excitement, the egg still on

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his beak, and together the black and white robbers gloried over the loot and vowed that herons were very fine birds to lay such eggs. It was noticeable, however, that Downy One never visited the heronry again—at least, not on business. Unlike some men, he knew when to stop, and he reckoned that one heron's egg was about his stopping point.



HE CAME ACROSS A STARLING
ON THE TOP OF AN OAK
TREE, "FRIZZLING"

One day about a week later, when his wife was setting on her full clutch of six eggs, Downy One was out on a foray, when he came across a starling on the top of an oak

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tree, "frizzling." Now the "frizzling" of a starling is what he calls a song. In reality it is an amazing war-dance. It consists of spitting out all the sounds you ever remember to have heard in a medley, accompanied by much gesture and violent shivering of the wings. It is an odd performance.

Downy One, sitting mute as a statue in the shade of the great, grand branches below, cocked his head on one side and took notes. He was by way of being an artist in mimicry himself, and took no pride in being outdone by a common, low-down starling, especially of the purple-headed kind, which all the wild knows is an alien—like the brown rat—and, as distinct from the native green-headed variety, has no right here at all. So he began "frizzling" on his own account.

How was he to know that Mrs. Starling was keeping house in a hole in that tree and that his perfect "frizzling" would bring her out of the nest looking for a flirtation or a fight, I do not know which?

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This set Downy One on the alert. There was business to be done here, apparently, as well as idle "frizzling." He lured Madam—surely she was a flirt—to a safe distance and then dived for her nest. By the time she had finished her—eh—improper amours with a starling that wasn't there and had returned, Downy One—innocent bird—was sitting on a bough out of sight of her nest, with one of her eggs—also out of sight—in his crop, and the cock starling was annoying the other birds nesting in that tree by his frantic search for a rival whom nobody had seen.

When all had settled down, including Madam on her remaining eggs, and Mr. Starling had recovered equilibrium enough to venture on another "frizzle"—evidently he knew his wife, by the way—Downy One joined in quietly. Then he jumped precisely nine inches and "froze."

Something had "frizzled" three feet from his right ear. Downy One was scared. What with the ghosts of Ghost Tower and the herons who threw spears, he had gained

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a frame of mind ready to believe any wonder.

After a few seconds he peered very cautiously through the clusters of notched oak leaves and beheld, of all things in the world, a head, a crested, speckled, well beaked, faintly pink head with a black mustache, a beak only one degree less villainous than his own, and a clear and roving eye, a most insolent, roguish eye, an eye full of deviltry and all manner of wickedness. Then if he had not been a bird, I feel convinced he would have laughed, laughed outright and heartily. He recognized in that head the leering, devil-may-care cranium of his cousin, the jay. He also had come to learn "frizzling."

What fiends' antics those two were up to in the course of the afternoon would fill more pages than I have wit to write—even if I knew, which I confess I do not. It is on record, however, that before Madam Starling found out that she was not running out to clandestine meetings with illicit serenaders, and Monsieur Starling had

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grasped the fact that he was dealing with enemies not rivals and "frizzling" was a public danger, no less than six out of the seven pale blue eggs in the Starlings' nest-hole sauntered—well, into spookland, it seemed.

They never came back, which would not have surprised you if you had seen the jay hurry away when a charge of number five shot cut the branches exactly between the two, a great scandal if the man had not been a keeper who had been wondering "where on earth the darned mags" had been nesting for the last week. The same keeper followed Downy One on his leisurely way through the darkening woods even into Ghost Tower itself. Downy One was unaware that his slow progress and brilliant black and white uniform enabled him to be so followed. If he had—but never mind.

It was about the hour when the noctule bats fly high and the pipistrelles fly low and the blackbird scolds imaginary foes before going to sleep and the mists crawl up out of the damp places like gray octopi and cast

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their tentacles over the low lands, and

“All the world a solemn stillness holds.”

“Now I’ve got you,” said the man, as he watched Downy One vanish within Ghost Tower. He thought he was very brave, set his teeth, put fresh cartridges in his gun, cocked the hammers—they made a clean double “snick” in the still air of the deserted place—and stepped boldly inside the keep.

Next instant his hands were flung up wildly, shielding and beating from his eyes a thing, a snoring, hissing, beating, tearing, clawed, and fierce-eyed thing that slashed at the man’s face like a fiend possessed till the gun went off with a rending roar.

“The ghosts!” gasped the man.

Like his predecessor, the laborer, he was not frightened. He will tell you so, even though he did not remember that tawny owls will frequently attack those who venture near their nest when the shadows fall. He remembered his supper—poor, dear man, so he did. He ran home for that reason. And Downy One, with his pert head

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skewed round the angle of his front door, appeared to be asking innocently: "Gadzooks!—what is all the bother about?"

The arrival of that man home, flushed, hot, and scratched about the face, was untimely and unfortunate. The scratches were, to say the least of it, suggestive, so also his refusal to say what had driven him to flight—at least he had some shame. His wife, knowing nothing of tawny owls, thought—naturally, poor woman—of other things. So it happened that there brewed a beautiful family row, and, while the tawny owl was murdering rats in the man's backyard and Downy One was peacefully asleep in his fastness at home, the man was vainly seeking for that sleep under an appalling torrent of reproach, abuse, suspicion, and he alone knows what other womanly barbs beside.

Need I say that, after that, the magpies—and their allies the tawny owls too, for the matter of that—hatched out their young successfully?

Fate owed them that, I think.

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And the man—well, ask him, only duck when you have put the question. His replies are apt to be quick and delivered from the shoulder.

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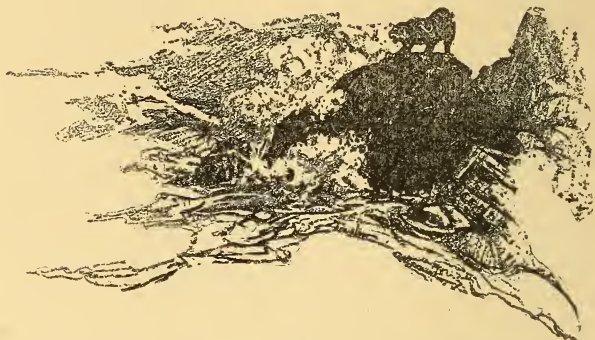
WHEN the *Sadie D. Hartland* chose to pile herself up on the rocks in a gale of large proportions from the southwest, she did the job with a whole heart. On an evening she was a full-rigged ship, superb for the eye to rest upon. On a morning, she was—firewood. The papers pounced upon her, held her before the eyes of men for a week, and then forgot about her because a certain prince had said something or something else, in a very after-dinner speech.

It was reported at the time that all "hands" were lost with the ship, but that was untrue. One was saved and with him we have to deal.

When the *Sadie D. Hartland* decanted her innards on the rocks a box shot forth, a big box with bars on one side, and a father

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of western ocean rollers, catching it with a sonorous gurgle, hurled it high and dry upon the gap-toothed rocks. Here it split very neatly into three pieces—as good boxes will, instead of turning into toothpicks—and rolled out upon the naked granite the “hand” in question. He was a huge-



HE CURSED THE DEEP BY ALL HIS GODS IN A
CONCENTRATED, SPITTING TORRENT OF
BLASPHEMY

pawed, green-eyed, slash-clawed, tuft-eared, stump-tailed devil, and the same was a bobcat, which is to North America what the wild cat is to Scotland, only more so.

He shook himself clear of the débris, bounced out of the way of the roaring, thun-

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dering, tumbling next wave, hauled himself clear of that ravening sea on to an upflung fang of rock, and, turning, cursed the deep by all his gods in a concentrated, spitting, swearing torrent of blasphemy. Thereafter he climbed to the cliff-top and stood staring, with inscrutable eyes and restless, switching apology for a tail, out upon the dumb, dark, rolling mystery of the moor.

He shook each paw cat fashion, cleaned himself as best he could, tested his claws on a heather stump, took one last look at the *Sadie D. Hartland* beating her heart out in the white smother below, and became extinct. That is to say, he became extinct to the human eye. To the eye of the wild—for not one foot falls in the wild without a hundred hidden watchers noting the fact—he crouched, slid forward, and crouched again, and the heather—with its back to the storm—took him in its arms, and he was not. An animal dealer somewhere in England was the poorer by a bob-cat reported lost in the wreck of the *Sadie D. Hartland*.

An hour later the bob-cat cast up a glen,

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still as a backwater, deep as a pit, where pine trees whipped and crashed along the flanking heights and a stream in a great hurry hustled down among the boulders.

The bob-cat, thinking he could find nothing better farther on in this new land, elected to make his lair there right off, but something moved somewhere, and he turned into a flattened mystery. Then a hare got up literally out of the ground and limped into space, a red fox—grinning from ear to ear—which had been watching the hare, uprose and suddenly remembered an appointment in the opposite direction, and a weasel panicked past in a tearing hurry. Whereupon the bob-cat became as the clay itself in stillness, for he knew by these signs that some great one of the wilds was at hand.

Came a sigh and a whisper and a deep breathing somewhere in the gloom, and the bob-cat quivered and stiffened from head to foot. Followed a long, tense pause, in which presumably the great one was taking stock of the glen. Then something purred.

The bob-cat may have moved on legs. I

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don't know. To the eye it appeared as if he did not—as if, in fact, he slid along on an invisible rail, and his head and tail and back were in line and his belly was on the ground.

When he stopped, he did so because a clearing checked him, and in the clearing was the biggest, most evil visaged, slouching, slit-eared ruffian of a cat Nature ever made a mistake in planning. That was bad. Farther on and lying down was another, and a smaller one. That was worse. And they were making love, and that was worst of all. If anything was needed to complete the awkwardness of affairs, the moon suddenly started dodging about behind hustling clouds and turned the world into piebald patches that hunted one another over the rugged picture aggravatingly.

Here was the wild-cat of Scotland, the cat-a-mountain of the legends, which is no more than the most wicked catastrophe that hunts on four legs. This the bob-cat did not know, but what he saw was enough, quite enough, and he needed no books to tell him the rest. He wished himself out of it and

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tried to execute the wish, but a patch of light caught him in a bare place and he stayed, because in the gloom that followed the purring stopped; so did he.

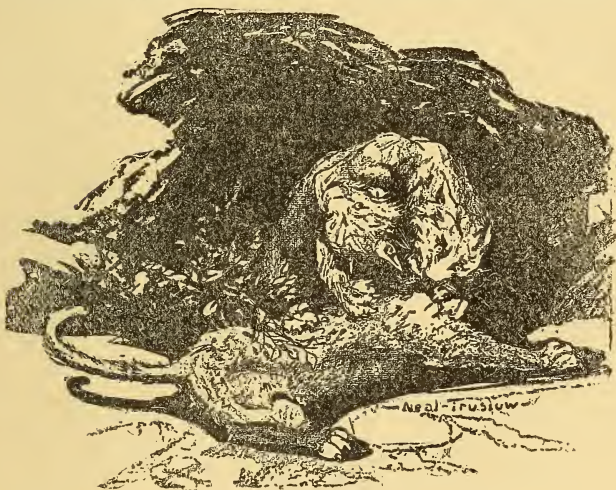
A whiff of his scent maybe; a glimpse as of a patch of mist drifting away; a whisper from some shifted leaf; all, or every one, of these things may have caught the wild-cat's attention. He was in love, for one thing. For another, he had ruled over those parts, lord paramount among all the wild hunters, for many years. All beasts, excepting the ponderous red stag, broke trail for him when he hunted. None dared face him. He was a terror, a nightmare, even to his own kind. In three bounds he was close to the cause of alarm.

Then, very slowly, the bob-cat turned. His eyes shot green-yellow flame. His ears were gone, flattened, invisible. His claws unsheathed. His body was a steel spring ready set, a dangerous toy to play with even for a man. And he stared the wild-cat between the eyes—a slow, evil, insolent stare.

Thereafter it is on record that terrible

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things happened. The foxes paused as they glided hunting afar, appalled at the sounds of that battle. The slow pole-cat—who knew no ordinary fear save the wild-cat and whose smell is awful—removed from that glen in haste. The heavy badger, bent on he alone knows what secret errand, checked



THEREAFTER IT IS ON RECORD THAT TERRIBLE
THINGS HAPPENED

at the clamor and, turning aside, made a careful detour. The gentle-eyed does, feeding to leeward on the flank of the mountain,

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caught the tumult from afar and clattered, snorting, to the higher slopes in frantic terror.

Everywhere through the wild, as a ripple spreads far and wide, the news of the duel swept and eddied and half the wild folk of the mountain were aroused, watchful, nervous, ill at ease, fearing they knew not what. All the time the storm roared and lashed over the glen, and the turmoil of a worse storm, the storm of beasts in combat, came back to the watchers from out its depths.

The she-cat was the first to go. She fled without shame, leaving her lord to the benefit of his quarrel. The sky, however, had paled to dawn before he himself, her lord in question, followed. And the sun, as if on purpose, turned all the gaunt, mist-wreathed, mountain-rent, superb land to crimson fire. He was a sight for the gods, that wild-cat, but not for men. A horrible picture, a blot on the landscape, he reeled as he walked, drunkenly, numbly, stupidly, groping blindly in the new-born light, and it needed not that light to turn him red.

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The bob-cat went away also, but none save a watchful old cock grouse saw his going. He went, belly flat, with that lack of haste, that extraordinary self absorption, peculiar to cats. Part of his left ear was not, his complexion was a trifle upset, his fur was ruffled, but the working parts of him were sound and he had spilt no more blood than was healthy. What he had done—and this he did not know then—was to start a very pretty little blood feud and burden himself with a life-long foe who for sheer evilness had only one equal in all the world—himself.

Day had dawned. The wild duck, streaming high and fast back to the sea, said so. The black-cock, calling all the glory of the sun to witness that he was without equal for beauty, agreed with them. The single, lonely old “fourteen pointer” stag, plodding up to the heights after a night spent raiding lowland fields proved it. And by all the time-worn and time-proven Laws of the Cats, the bob-cat should have found himself a lair. But when you have fought

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long and strenuously, two things are needed before sleep—food and drink.

The second the stream gave. The first he found in a marsh under the shadow of a hill and much mist. The marsh was given over to wild duck and other things of interest to bob-cats.

On the sedge-flanked edge of a pool the bob-cat made his stalk and the end of it was a mallard drake; it was also the end of the drake. One moment a full, plump, proud, handsome bird; the next, a limp, feathered heap. There had come a lightning leap of something, a half opening of the bird's scimiter wings, a hissing, slashing blow and then—the whispering, mysterious, terrifying silence of the marshes.

The bob-cat, picking up his prize, turned, and as he turned, he cringed and sank into his tracks, lower and lower, till it seemed that he must be going back into the earth whence he was wrought. Nothing had spoken. No footfall had squelched the ooze. But the light of the full-eyed sun had been blotted out. A shadow had fallen

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athwart the bob-cat and it was as the shadow of doom.

The cat's inscrutable eyes flashed upward and he saw wings. That was the first impression the huge shadow gave one—wings, vast, rustling, wonderful! The second impression was of power, relentless, bold, insolent, proud power, backed by the full panoply of war, driven by Strength with a capital S. There is only one bird in all the world that carries that "grand presence," that aloof, regal, calm sense of power, and that is the eagle. This the bob-cat knew. That this was a white-tailed sea eagle was of no account to him. It was the fact that it seemed hungry that counted, for your eagle full is a barn-door fowl, but your eagle hungry is a mishap.

"Errrrrr-pht!" said the cat. "Mmm-mmmhrrrr-pht!"

The remark was full and complete. Even a lamb would have known its meaning. The eagle did. He "backed air" and reconsidered, while the cat continued to blow off steam at thirty-second intervals. Even an

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eagle is not above taking hints, nor was this one above taking wild duck from other people. Till then, however, the other people had not included bob-cats. There was nothing in his ten years' experience of a disreputable, checkered career to cover bob-cats.

At last, presuming on the effect his bad language had created, the bob-cat raised his prey and edged to cover. He knew that an eagle is, if one may so term it, at sea in cover, and cover is the bob-cat's realm. Then the eagle fell.

It was as if a young volcano had taken unto itself life in that place. One could not tell which was cat and which was eagle. There was chaos and all manner of unseemly noises that scared the wild ducks that owned the place into a whirring cloud and jarred the other things—rats mostly and an otter or two—out of their beauty sleep.

I do not know what happened in that argument. Much of it appeared to be mud and bad language. Nor do I know who claimed to be victor. Anyway, it ceased as

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THERE WAS CHAOS AND ALL MANNER OF UNSEEMLY
NOISES

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suddenly as it had begun, though how the bob-cat managed to get himself and his duck into the reeds without being converted into strips is a puzzle. He looked much like a French poodle when the eagle had done with him, and the eagle appeared to have moulted at the wrong time of the year. The rest of that day the bob-cat spent in the heart of the reed jungle and the eagle poised overhead for many hours—he appeared about the size of a butterfly—looking for the bob-cat.

Toward evening the marsh folk seemed to get up and fly about, and one wondered where on earth they all came from. Ducks of many kinds beat up from the sea—the cat could smell the salt air where he lay—and the plaintive “wee-uu” of widgeon mingled continually with the ceaseless “q-u-a-r-k” of mallard drakes leading their people to feed. Teal shot athwart the reeds in showers, like partridges driven hard down wind, and geese hurled the miles behind them in swinging, far-flung companies, journeying from the unknown, Heaven and they alone

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knew where, singing the while their grand wild song of travel—"Honk, honk, honka honk, honka, honka, honk."

Once a flock of garganey—those beautiful little blue duck with white pencilings—hurtled down into the water like shot, and a slashing, raking, clipper-built peregrine falcon, balked by the diving of his prey, the garganey, swept to a post hung with festoons of green weed, where he sat brooding, a savage figure of rapine, in the eye of the furnace red sun. Once a little company of ringed plover—small and dapper birds—drifted by, like a puff of brown smoke, and a great bird, not so much big as huge winged, dropped out of the sky without warning and, passing clean through the flock of ringed plover, diminished their number by one.

This bird was hawk-like in his "stoop," but in that alone. In shape he was gull-like, in color he was dark almost to blackness, and his name was Richardson's skua; if they had called him Richardson's devil it would have been more to the point. Robber

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was writ large all over him, and his shadow was a nightmare throughout this waste.

The bob-cat stood up to go. Watching other folks hunt had made him hungry. He struck a spur of a mountain running out like a finger into the marsh—which had probably once been a lake—and on the spur was a hog mane of Scotch firs. The rushes ran up to within fifty yards of the trunks, and——

The bob-cat fell flat and stayed there. Down the beach, as it were, of the spur an animal was coming, and its business was urgent and private. It might have been a shadow gone astray for all the noise it made, yet it was big, as we count bigness in these degenerate days of a smitten and attenuated wild. Men called it a doe red-deer. If a man had seen it then, he would have called it a wraith, or a cloud shadow, or a mist puff, according to his disposition.

Once it flung up its head and analyzed the heavy air. Once it worked round in a circle and confused its own tracks. And once it made as if to bolt back to the cover

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of the Scotch firs. That was when a fox came out of the reeds and ran away, driven forth by something unseen that must have been watching there. But after standing with her huge hind quarters doubled under her, ready to go or stay, listening with her great ears cocked forward for some time, she turned to the marsh and the reeds swallowed her up.

After the doe had vanished—about a quarter of an hour after—there came to the shore of that spur a great maned stag, who threshed about among the reeds for some time, evidently in search of her, and went away again without success. All the while the bob-cat lay like stone, and the hidden thing, which had ousted the fox, lay like stone; neither beast was aware of the other, and both deer were unaware of either. It was a strange game, this hidden watching of one knows not what, but it is a game that Nature loves, a game which is played without cessation in the wild, come winter, come summer, come light, come dark.

As night shut down the bob-cat uprose

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and slid after the doe red-deer into the heart of the swamp. He kept to the path that she had made for herself. There was firm ground here, if one could jump from tussock to tussock of deer grass. All the time the wild fowl clamored far and near and the wind sang strange, weird songs among the reeds.

At last the path led to an inlet, where the remnants of gorse and other scrub fought with the rushes and the evil, carnivorous sundew splashed the ground with red stains like blood. Three gaunt, wind-driven Scotch firs stood guard over this islet. One of the firs was crowned with a nest—huge as a wheelbarrow load—and on the nest stood a bird of prey—it was a kite, I think—and it was asleep.

One-two-three hours slid by, and at the end of that time, the doe went away again, and the bob-cat, who had been lying, drenched with dew, waiting for her departure, heard the whisper of her footfall die out into the blackness. Then he moved forward to the shadow under the firs where

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she had spent her time. He knew what he was going to find there, but he found something more, much more.

A sound, half sob, half cry, burst faintly upon the night. Only quick ears could hear it, but the bob-cat heard it, and—miracle of miracles—the doe must have heard it too. Now, by the lowest estimate, she cannot have been far short of a thousand yards away at the time, but she was a mother, and the cry was the cry of her fawn, and very many things are possible to a mother which pass the understanding of men.

Anyway, the bob-cat bolted for the spot—it was precisely what he was there for—but the doe overtook and passed him on the way, going like the wind. When he arrived he found an entirely mad doe plunging about among the soft bracken and grass in the blackness under the trees, where she had evidently hidden her fawn—found her, and that was all.

Fawns do not leave the secret place in which their mother hides them under any circumstances. That is the law of the cleft-

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hoofed folk, and he who breaks it dies swiftly at the hand of enemies without the gates. The doe knew this, and the bob-cat knew it, and they were both mad together. Only, the bob-cat kept his madness to himself. He had no wish to meet this lady bereft of her child; he had rather encounter a cyclone.

Yet it was he who sought and found the trail of the beast that had removed that fawn—even he who had spent half that night trailing the doe for the very purpose of removing her treasure himself. He it was, also, now so strangely the doe's ally, who followed that trail as only a bob-cat could follow it, silent, relentless, secret, and terrible, the incarnation of the avenger—the avenger, strangely enough, for a beast who knew not of his existence and would have blotted him out in the mud for the murderer he would have been, if she had.

The last the bob-cat saw of that poor doe, as he moved off along the hot trail of the unknown, was a crazy beast charging all ways at once, stopping only now and then

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to utter queer little mother sounds and listen quivering for an answer. The only answer was the hushed whispering of the three tree-tops and the melancholy song of the reeds.

The trail led him across the marsh by the way he had come. Later it dived into a maze of broken, jagged ravines, where a tiny waterfall—a solid column of jade green flanked with virgin white foam—tumbled out of the darkness above into the darkness below, and great shadows, which were red-deer, shifted confusedly on the slopes at his passing. After that the trail struck up to Heaven, it seemed, and he climbed painfully to dun, boulder-freckled slopes, where the blue hares frisked in the moonlight and the air grew very cold. Finally, at a mighty gash in a cloud-wrapped peak, above all the world, he stopped and crouched. The trail dropped into the gash, and the pestilential smell of a wild beasts' lair came out of the place.

Here he decided to wait and watch, but nothing happened, so he entered. There were things in that place, young things, and

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they mewed helplessly. For a moment he had a mind to kill the young things, but in moving toward them he stumbled—it was as dark as a blank, black wall in there—over something warm. It was the fawn, and it was dead. That much his whiskers showed him. Instantly he seized it and turned to go. Then he froze!

A shadow had fallen across the entrance and two eyes, greenish-yellow, large, and apparently on fire, regarded him silently. It was the old wild-cat; the place was his and the things which mewed were his kittens. He himself had never entered the place before, I think. It was his wife's special sanctuary, so he must have been trailing the bob-cat all the time.

Next instant he lifted up his voice for his mate—'twas the voice of a bad dream, a malignant, appalling yell—and she came. The bob-cat heard her clattering up the slope, spitting fire and brimstone at every stride, and her eyes were not of this earth at all, but belonged to the Lower Regions.

Only one thing exceeded the bob-cat's

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anxiety to get out of that den, and that was the mother cat's anxiety to get into it, and between them they put up the biggest thing in "scraps" that ever shocked that mountain-side since the wolves howled in the ravines and the reindeer ranged the slopes. It was immense, appalling, stupendous. It was also quite indescribable, for the bob-cat fought both of them.

By what miracle he got himself to the islet in the swamp again is not known. His normal color was the color of the mist under the trees. His color at that time, and for many hours after, was of sunset, and he very much more nearly resembled a rag-bag than a bob-cat, or any animal at all. The stoat who saw him pass and the short-eared owl who followed him aver that he was four hours covering the down-hill journey from the den of many horrors to the islet, and he had been only half an hour going up. He crawled as an insect crawls, and for a full day after any man could have followed his trail by sight and at the trot.

For a day and a night and another day

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that bob-cat hid his head in some unknown fastness on the island. None saw him during that time. In fact, none looked for him. The wild folk considered that he was safer there—wherever it was—than sliding about in the shadows up to Heaven knows what mischief, and the longer he remained there the better they liked it.

At the end of the second day, news went forth that the new terror was abroad again. One, a water-vole, had seen his eyes—balls of yellow-green flame—burning dully at the mouth of a dim den. Another, a roe-deer, had, fortunately for her, picked out his lithe, stealthy form sliding silently as a smoke-puff toward the mountains. Another, a marsh harrier, had marked his passage across the marsh by the swaying of the reeds as he went.

The bob-cat had quite recovered by that time. I mean he had quite recovered his strength and his health, and his appetite was a public danger, no less. Only his temper he had not recovered. That was lost, shattered forever, though, as he generally lost it

THE SURVIVOR

about six times in the twenty-four hours anyway, the loss was not great.

The day died slowly, and all the world stood by, silent, hushed, awed, waiting for the end. An old cock-grouse buzzed by, straightened and stopped his wing, and slid down on a long slant. The bob-cat's whiskered face and tufted ears thrust up out of the grass, and an odd green sheen drifted across his eyes as he watched.

The grouse was down somewhere out of sight over the shoulder of a bluff, and the bob-cat removed to that place swiftly. Before he got there, however, he made a great discovery, and if the ground had been a little less hard, I think he would have sunk into it completely. A bush swayed, and a mottled black-and-white head, with horns in a complete curve, thrust out therefrom. Sheep, telegraphed the bob-cat's nose to his brain, and he straightway fell flat. In a few minutes he became conscious of things moving all about him, and it seemed that he had gotten him into the middle of a big flock of sheep spread over the mountain-side.

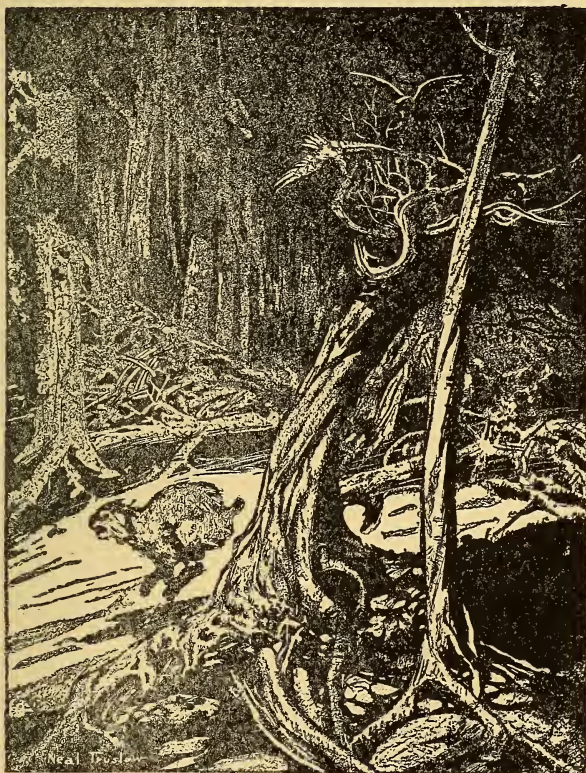
PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Now there are a great many things easier than lying in the middle of a scattered flock of mountain sheep without being discovered, while to quit that flock without causing a general wild and compromising stampede is a maneuver to be marveled at. Yet that bob-cat did more, he quitted the flock taking a lamb with him, and none of them, not even its own mother, ever knew where that lamb went to.

Then he slouched down the hillside well pleased with all the world, and especially with himself, and then—he shot exactly one yard straight up in the air as if he had stepped upon a hornet's nest, or awakened a viper, and the yell that he let forth made one's hair stand up. Then he went, and the going of him was amazing. He just went off like a squib, and hissing much worse than any squib, and he—well, he was not.

There was a trap, and the trap was specially placed to entertain the foxes. If the lamb had not been a heavy one, the bob-cat would not have trailed half of it on the ground, and the man who set the trap would

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THEN HE WENT, AND THE GOING OF HIM WAS
AMAZING

have caught a very fine bob-cat and a tartar
to boot. As it was, he caught the lamb, but

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since that poor little fluffy one was already dead it did not make much difference.

When he had cooled off a bit, so to speak, the bob-cat ceased galloping and swearing and began to feel hungry instead. Wandering deviously in search of a meal, he climbed to the up-flung crest of a mountain and there he fell among a new and strange people.

A raven, almost as black as its own black heart, crowned a pinnacle and cursed him in an unknown and unholy tongue. On every rock perched a cock-ptarmigan, and their hen birds must have been all around, though neither he nor any other beast was gifted with the eyes to unravel them from their surroundings, while blue hares limped and sat about in all directions and said nothing at all.

The bob-cat stalked a blue hare most stalkily, but a ptarmigan got up just out of paw's reach and gave him away. Then he stalked the ptarmigan, and a raven—who had visions of getting what the bob-cat was pleased to leave—came and croaked over his

THE SURVIVOR

head so excitedly and idiotically that the ptarmigan thought something must be wrong somewhere and invited himself into space. Then the bob-cat, in despair, stalked the raven, after that knowing one had settled again, and the raven waited till he was just about to spring before rising twenty yards in the air and hurling evil gibes at him. Then he lost his temper, and the stupefied raven fled to the next mountain, and the blue hares went out of sight over the crest and did not return, and the ptarmigan became scarce in the clouds that wrapped the place about.

It is a terrible thing, the losing of a temper. The bob-cat did it thoroughly. There was none of your stoic Indian calm about him; he exploded in yells at fifteen-second intervals, and when he wasn't yelling he was digging his dagger-like claws into the good earth and snarling and spitting like a locomotive on an up-grade. And he bounded six feet at a bound, slashing whistling, wicked slashes with his big suggestive paws at the empty air.

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Anon he was crouching flat-bodied, flat-eared, calling all the imperious, silent, proud peaks to witness his hard luck. Then he cast his eyes down the giddy slope, and it was as if a hand had passed over him, turning him to stone.

A form, dim and phantom-like, drifted through the mist below, drifted and passed from sight like a gray ghost. It was the she wild-cat. She was out on a hunting foray, and behind her came another gray shadow, which the bob-cat knew was her mate, though he was most like a patch of mist that had detached itself from the surrounding mist and floated away.

For five minutes after they had gone the bob-cat remained still and dumb as a statue. Then with a jerk of his bob-tail he flung about and traveled swiftly down hill at the unmistakable slouching trot of all the cats. He had work to do, dangerous work, work that only one of all the wildfolk in that land dared to attempt, and that one was himself.

He reached the gash in the mountain peak where the wild-cats lived. He passed

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within; silence there, nothing more. He had come for the kittens, to kill them, because he was hungry, for one reason, and because they belonged to his foe of foes, for another.

In the blanketing blackness of the place he stood quite still, and somewhere far away on a distant hill a shot sounded, short, slapping, vicious, the unmistakable report of a rifle; but here, in this den of thieves, outside, all around, was stillness, dead and dumb, the silence of a tomb.

The kittens were gone, spirited away by their mother, to a safer place perhaps. Maybe she had killed them, or their father, that diabolical ruffian of the slit ears, perhaps—but who can tell? Such things have been, and the day of understanding for us mortals is not yet.

The bob-cat swore softly and wickedly under his great bristling whiskers—and the swear was almost exactly duplicated from the outside. Why the “Tom” wild-cat had chosen that moment to return to that place is a puzzle known only to himself. Nor is it

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apparent why he swore, seeing that by that time he must have had a very exact and lively knowledge of the big foe's capabilities.

The bob-cat went out over his enemy's head, exactly as if he had been propelled violently from within by a spring. It was a grand leap and it cleared the wild-cat by just one foot. I think the bob-cat expected the mother of those kittens, and he was not anxious to meet her plus her husband again. When, however, he found that she was nowhere in sight, he dealt with the wild-cat swiftly and to the purpose.

The she-cat heard the unlovely riot from afar and returned at a speed much faster than you would ever have suspected her capable of. The first thing she saw was her lord stretched out in quite a picturesque attitude, and she knew at a glance what was ailing him. It was death that ailed him. The next thing she noticed was the bob-cat—she could only see his head and his unforgettable eyes—staring at her over the carcass of her husband. The third thing she

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noticed was the fact that the bob-cat was not looking at her at all, but past her, over her head, down hill, and, for the first and last time in her life, she saw fear in his eyes.

Then it seemed to her that his grim mask receded suddenly backward, like a face in a dream, receded and went out in the gathering mist, silently without warning, uncannily. The next instant she doubled upon herself, and the clear, sharp, kicking reports of two rifles rang out as she did so. She collapsed where she stood, got up again, took three strides in another direction—evidently the direction of the new lair in which she had hidden her young—collapsed again, and lay quite still.

Two keepers rose from behind some rocks and came up the slope without hurry, as without comment; they were Scotch. One of them tells me that he must have wounded the bob-cat unto death because no one ever saw him again. But that is no reason at all.

THE WHITE NIGHTMARE

THE WHITE NIGHTMARE

ON one side was a wood, and because it was of spruce-fir it was thick with low-hung boughs in place of brush-wood, and was filled with a thicker silence. On the other side a slithery slope, like unto the roof of a house for steepness, dotted with many boulders that seemed to hold their places by a special dispensation of Providence only. Then, lest any find the scene too cheerful, came a beast of strange aspect and stood 'twixt wood and slope.

They said this beast came from a hole in a "cairn" on the mountain. Perhaps—but he looked as if he had come from a place much deeper than any hole. Nature had given him a long body of wonderful twistfulness, then, forgetting what she had done, added legs two sizes too short. Then she went away, and Satan, coming along,

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finished the job. He added a head—surely no one save he could have evolved such a head—that had a sharp muzzle, and upright, rounded, short ears, a head shaped like a wedge, and gave to it an expression genuinely diabolical. For color he chose a grim brown-black. Later he added an un-



THE POLECAT WATCHED THEM

quenchable thirst for something much less innocent than water and an odor which would spoil the best appetite for a week. Finally, lest all the wild folk turn and abolish it, he struck fear out of its composition and added teeth like stilettos set on end.

THE WHITE NIGHTMARE

Men called this tragedy a polecat, and then, as if to contradict the title, placed it at the head of the weasel tribe, where it stands to this day.

Six grouse—red grouse—burst over the place like shells, and dropped in a heap over a heather-mantled ridge. The polecat watched them. There are many things worse than grouse to eat and very many things easier to catch, for an old cock grouse knows all that anyone can teach him about keeping out of harm's way, and a bit over. Polecats, however, are not met every day—or every year, for the matter of that—and their ways of hunting are not those of every wild hunter.

He moved to that ridge. I say “moved” because the gait of a polecat is—well, the gait of a polecat. It is all his very own—and the rest of his tribe's. It is not walking, or running; galloping would not describe it; nor is it a canter. It resembles the going of a snake as much as it resembles anything at all.

The grouse were feeding well in the open,

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having no desire to feed anything else in their turn; also they kept there. There was no chance of their working nearer as they fed. And the polecat—twisted among the twisted stems of heather—anathematized them from afar. That occupation did not—as it does with some people—prevent him from thinking, however, and the result was about the strangest sort of polecat those grouse ever clapped eyes upon.

He turned acrobat, that polecat, and contortionist, and many other things that are without a name. What the grouse saw was a twisting, twining, twirling, tottering, tumbling, trembling tom-fool of a thing, and, being grouse, they were forthwith eaten up with curiosity—and they stayed. That the entirely unknown and unaccountable apparition was drawing nearer with every contortion did not strike them. They simply stood and stared, a fat-cheeked, fowl-like stare, and the polecat, who was temporizing—and extemporizing—calculated each display to bring him at least an inch closer to his prey. It was hard work, and it was

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also quite a close thing as to which would give out first, the birds' curiosity, or the polecat's breath.

Followed a jump, a squawk, a great confloption of feathers, and the grouse came back to things earthly with a jerk. Five of them shot into the distance and one of them shot into—oblivion. The polecat had him by the neck, and when a polecat gets his teeth that way the owner of that neck may as well say his prayers very quickly indeed. Then that polecat dined after the manner of his kind, which means that he took so little that it seemed a pity to have killed the bird at all, and certainly not worth all that back-aching trouble.

Now, when you have just jumped flop into the dinner of a grouse family and have forcibly, not to say roughly, detained one member of that family for your own dinner, you expect to lose the pleasure of their company for at least a day. Therefore, when that flock come back from over the superb, tumbled, rolling riot of mountain, hill, and heather, and drop like stones within ten

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yards of you, you naturally want to know what on earth, or under it, has gone wrong with nature.

The polecat yanked his flat head around and looked at those grouse as one would look at a madman, and the grouse said never a word, but flattened and looked, not at the polecat, if you please, but at the sky. There was the rub. They looked at the sky instinctively because they were birds, and the animal did not. Why he did not I cannot tell you, nor can anyone else. It is a fact that animals seldom look up, and the reason for such an omission is, as yet, beyond the knowledge of man.

Then it seemed as if a small-sized riot had begun on the giddy slope aforementioned. Someone on that slope was using language quite unfit for print, chattering obscenely, and the sound appeared to have electrified the polecat. Round jerked his snaky head and after the head flung the sinuous body. It was as if someone had cried "Murder." In a flash he was over that ridge, pounding along at his indescribable leaping, rippling

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double. He knew that voice, you see; had good cause to know it, for it was the voice of his mate.

He found her, and she was a sight to make one hold one's breath. Her face was the face of a bad dream, no less, and her eyes shone red—wickedly, fiendishly red—like rubies with a fire behind them, and she jibbered. Round her were gathered her two young, and I give you my word those young were not beautiful, but workmanlike, very workmanlike.

Now that polecat had left his mate with three young, not two. The third? Where was that third baby horror? The wind imitated the sounds of a low tide on a distant beach. A jay screeched from somewhere in the wood, a harsh, annoying screech. A raven croaked, an odd, snoring croak of evil omen, from a neighboring boulder, but they gave no answer to the dumb question.

Then the polecat dropped his nose and hunted as a hound hunts, with all a hound's keenness of smell and twice its cunning.

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He was slow, perhaps, painfully slow, but—well, ask any mountain hare as to the sureness of his tracking, and, if it does not faint at the mention of his name, it will tell you that his tracking is sure as death itself.

He picked up the trail of his lost son in the wood, followed it to the slope, threaded it to a bush under which a stream was born, and then—nowhere. It just went out, died, as if the owner had taken unto itself wings and flown away. This kind of thing is not customary in the wild, you understand. It is a canon that if you follow a beast's trail long enough you come to the beast. Nor can any animal very well miss the trail of a polecat, for the scent of these animals is a very shocking stink. Yet the old polecat flung up his head quite suddenly and finally. His son had apparently sauntered into Spookland.

It was a little thing, perhaps, no more than a claw-mark in the soft earth where the stream—that nature had destined to be a mighty river further down—trickled forth, but it explained everything. The sight of it

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turned the polecat to stone, and the setting sun turned him to blood-red stone, with bronze where the creases were, and the result was a picture that a painter would have



PASSED ONE AFTER THE OTHER DOWN HILL

given a year of his life to copy faithfully. Beside the mark of this claw were the round imprints of his son's paws, and all

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four of them could have been placed within the imprint of that huge claw, the claw of a bird without a doubt—but, ye gods, what a bird!

However, since the son had gone, and the unknown slayer had gone (taking the son with him, one presumes), and the grouse, and blackcock, and ptarmigan had gone—to sleep—and the sun was evidently just about to go, there was nothing for a polecat to do but to go too.

He went, that polecat, very silent, and very angry, and doubly watchful, through the deepening gloom, and the mist, that lived in the ravines and hollows and damp places by day, rose up and swirled about him. Owls came out and hooted, barked, shrieked, or snored at him, according to their species. A heron flapped homeward, shouting at the night his rancorous, bad-tempered shout, and the badgers—low, gray shadows in the mist—passed one after the other down-hill, on secret errands bent.

Then nature suspended in the void a great, round moon, shedding a light all the

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more brilliant because of the mist, strange though this may sound to a townsman. And the polecat put up a hare. 'Twas a small matter, to put up a hare. There were plenty of them in this place, the finiking, limping blue hares of the mountains. He dropped his head, picked up the trail, and gave chase with a dumb persistence that looked bad for that hare.

There was no hurry about this beast. It is never he that is certain who hurries. The end was known to him already and to the hare; at least, they thought it was, for when a polecat fixes to the trail of a beast he might just as well be fixed to the beast's throat for all the chance it has of getting away.

You know how a hare can run, with or without cause; how she eats up the miles, as a child eats up sweets, and walks into the background before you are aware. That hare did not. If a fox had given chase she would have slid into the next county without thought, but the fox would have hunted full speed and lost the scent or given up in

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disgust. This thing, this low, slow horror, this polecat, moved no faster than a man might trot slowly, but he would stick to the scent till the Day of Judgment or dawn came to stop him. This the hare knew. She knew that no speed would disgust him, and she was equally certain that she could not "stay" till dawn—or the Day of Judgment, either, for the matter of that. Therefore terror seized her like unto a palsy, turning her blood to water, weighting her limbs with lead, numbing her, and dropping her speed till a terrier, aye, even a dachshund would have laughed at it.

Then something unforeseen happened, and for the second time that night the polecat stopped dead on a trail that stopped, even deader. For the second time that night, also, he flung up his head quite suddenly, whimpering an odd little whimper—almost of anguish, it seemed—on a trail that died into the earth, or air, and went out like a snuffed candle. And for the second time that night, too, he found himself staring at a claw-mark, huge, forbidding, uncanny,

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the footprint of a bird, it seemed, in every way identical with the one that had cut his son's trail—and his life—off short in the beginning.

There was something oddly stupid in the way the polecat stared blankly at that claw-mark, for an animal at a loss for the reason of a thing is either oddly stupid, or frightened, and a polecat, so it seems, cannot be frightened. He knew, he must have known, that before him was the claw-mark of a bird, yet, even then, he did not for some seconds look up, so strong is this habit—curse one might almost call it—that is laid upon all the four-footed ones.

About this time the polecat became aware of eyes, two in number, not smaller than a marguerite, and they were on fire, those eyes, so that they flashed and in them was the cruelty and cold ferocity of several fiends. Behind the eyes was something, he could not tell quite what, a shadow, a spook, a great white shape or ghost, which flapped and flapped and never said a word.

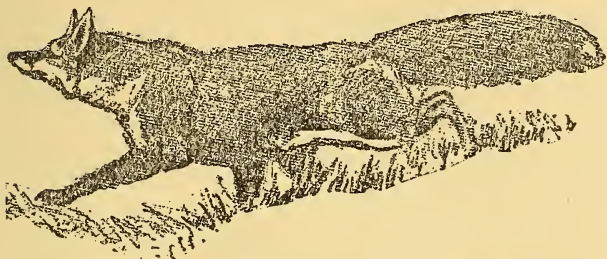
The polecat is a slow beast as the wild

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folk go, and fear was eliminated from his composition by the—never mind. He had, however, as much love for his own life as any of us, perhaps because he and death so often met. Therefore he became a contortionist and acrobat for the second time, with the tables reversed, and found himself—goodness and himself alone know how he got there—behind a boulder. From the boulder to a heather-patch was the matter of a leap, and from the heather-patch to the cairn of stones in the spruce-fir wood where he lived, the matter of about the fastest thing in running—or whatever he called his peculiar gait—that he had ever found it necessary to put up. He did not look round once. Indeed, he had quite enough to do to keep his feet in the blind smother of herbage, but once he felt something fan the back of his neck and it was as the breath from the grave.

Next evening, after the fox had departed on business, but before the badger had shoved his gray snout out of the “cairn”—it had many lodgers, that “cairn”—the

THE WHITE NIGHTMARE



THE FOX HAD DEPARTED ON BUSINESS

polecat went forth to appease a terrible hunger. He went first, however, to drink from a stream that meandered chuckling, always chuckling, through the cathedral shades of the wood. The sun had almost burned out as he lifted his flat head and turned to go.

Then his eyes fell upon something about a yard away. It was a smudge, an unclean blot, the spot where a bird—presumably a grouse which had come to that place for water—had been violently done to death. Such sights are not uncommon in the wild. Beasts must live, and they are not all made alike, but—and here the polecat relapsed into cover as if he had been fired at—this particular blot had by the side of it the claw-

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mark of a bird. The polecat knew what that meant, or rather he did not know what it meant, but would very much have liked some one to tell him. It was the same claw-mark as the one he had beheld the night before, and it could not be considered a good omen on which to begin a night's hunting.

There was a river not far away, broad and flat-bottomed, not particularly fast, as hill rivers go, but shallow and haunted by the lordly trout. Into this river the polecat slid, not indeed as to the manor born, but as to the manor trained. The trout is no flat fish to be walked up on a flat bottom. He lies head to swell, and he sees you first every time. There is no bluff about the trout. He throws his stake on speed, and in nine cases out of ten the quickness of the fish deceives the eye.

The polecat put up such a trout, cut him off from open water, headed him into a shallow, and, after half an hour's fancy dancing, landed him all glistening to flash back the silver moon. In that hour he fed as a king feeds, with all due regard to the sensation

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his appearance created along the bank. All members of the weasel tribe love to cut a figure, I think; to rouse the town, as it were; to know the terror of their own name.



LANDING HIM ALL GLISTENING

The rabbits and the voles—water and field—were hopping about with fright, and the moorhens, and coots, and others of the river birds were dancing can-cans of horror; while the rats, the rowdy, low ruffians that

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haunt every river front, turned fairly giddy with fear and went about yammering insanely as if dazed. All because they had seen, and, worse still, smelt that double-dyed slayer, the polecat. They knew it was he, because although the moon—who is the mother of shadows—may even deceive the quickness of a trained wild eye, there is no mistaking that deadly, sickly, concentrated essence of stink, which is peculiar to the polecat, and—thank Heaven—to him alone.

All at once the whole company “froze,” became stiff and rigid with a very sudden rigidity. It was as if a Voice had bid them be still, and still they were as death. There are two kinds of fear in the wild. One produces movement and sound. The other produces stupor. Evidently the latter, and greater, fear was at hand.

The polecat did not deal much in fear himself, save to dispense it, but he had never dispensed fear like that. Then something fell with a thud out of the night, fell and was still. The polecat crouched, his little red eyes fixed upon the thing, a dim blotch

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among the grass blades, but the thing did not get up and walk away as he expected. It had done with movement forever.

Then the water birds, who had been the first to crouch, got up and went away very quietly and without remark, almost as if they held one claw up to their beak. The rabbits and the rats followed, faded back into the shadows that had given them birth, and they, too, said nothing at all. [The polecat was alone, alone in all that half-suggested silent world, where the moonlight showed so little and the darkness hid so much.

It was the curiosity which is part of the heritage of the weasel tribe that prompted him to get up and go to look at that dim something lying huddled in the silver grass. He stood a yard away and sniffed—one sniff only.

If a galvanic battery had been at that moment started under his feet he would have—well, acted as he did. Every hair on his body sat straight up, and under it the loose skin rippled, and the sound that came

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from his mouth was not the sound of a sane animal at all. He swore strange and terrible things in a sudden wild gibber, executing the while a mad dance for the space of one minute. Then he went, not slowly and quite blindly, into the night, still gibbering as one who is in pain, or mad, or both.

And the thing which lay on the ground never said a word. It was a young polecat—his young polecat, and on its shoulder lay a single feather, a large soft feather, white with the whiteness of driven snow. No wonder he gibbered, that polecat. Imagine one's only daughter descending from the clouds and for the best of reasons offering neither explanation nor apology for the miracle. If anything was needed to complete the surprise, that feather smelt as the claw-mark had smelt, had come from the same bird, or spook, or devil, or whatever it was that sailed about the night sky and worked unholy miracles. It was to be presumed that that same spook thing had carried off his young one and dropped it by chance while passing above him; at

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least, that seemed the most natural theory.

After that the thing became a nightmare, and a bad one at that. Those wretched claw-marks seemed to haunt the polecat wherever he went, till he almost came to look for them. Everywhere in the soft ground they showed, and always where some bird or beast had been violently done to death and eaten on the spot.

One night, while loafing along a string of marshy pools where the resplendent wild duck was wont to feed—and feed him, upon occasion—he became aware of a small-sized riot opening up from the mist-hung darkness of the largest pool of all. Something was in trouble there, so that it squawked aloud in a wild and public-spirited fashion. Three wild duck got up from the place and whizzed away above him, and he knew by the whistling of their wings that they had had a mighty scare. Followed a great snarling, and after the snarling a series of surprised and terrified yelps. They were the sounds that a fox might make in a trap, perhaps. This the polecat knew, but he

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knew, also, that there were no traps anywhere near there.

He approached that place through a tunnel that the otters used among the reeds. In the middle of that tunnel he met something in a hurry. It was swearing horribly, that thing, and it ran blindly into the polecat so that they rolled over together, fighting like cats. It must have been an otter. At least, that was the impression the polecat had, but whatever it was it scrambled to its feet on the instant and vanished down the tunnel, still stumbling dazedly, still swearing thickly.

As for the polecat, he got up and continued his path of investigation, spitting out fur as he went. Next moment another thing burst into the tunnel, yelping as it came, and there was no pleasure, but only a great and very fresh fear in the yelp. The polecat flattened against the wall of the tunnel this time, watching the filmy green eyes of the thing anxiously, for he feared it was mad. It passed, brushing his fur all along one side and reeking of bad odors, and he

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turned and saw by the tail of it that it was the fox who lodged in the same "cairn" he patronized. He was a hard old fox, not given to panic, and had not run from anything save dogs for many a year.

It seemed to the polecat that as he reached the pool a white and shadowy something floated away over the reeds, but it made no sound, though it was of immense size. It was but a suspicion of a glimpse he had of it, and it did not come back.

He found where the otter had come up out of the oily black water and fallen upon the wild duck, the couch in the reeds whence the fox had watched and sprung out at the otter, the mud on the lip of the pool, all plowed and splattered, where the two had held a fanged argument. Then—then he turned and went away quickly. The thing that had eaten the wild duck—the bunched feathers were evidence enough—was neither fox nor otter, but the unknown bird, whose claw-marks were all around. He understood then the conduct of the other hunters and knew why they were streaked with

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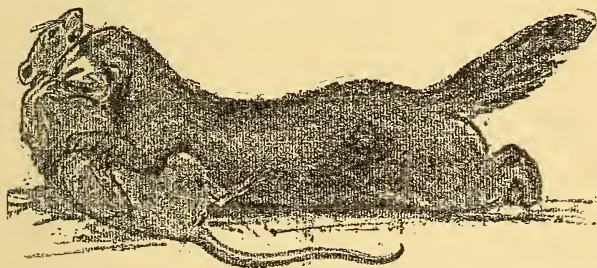
gashes such as might be made by many small stilettos. They had been so foolish as to argue with the white nightmare, a mistake on their part not likely to be repeated by any of them.

The polecat removed to a hill-farm, small, and rude, and squat. He was in a hurry to feed and get back to his "cairn." Something was wrong with the wild to-night. Everyone crept about with their fingers on their mouths, as it were, and if any crossed the open, they did so at the gallop, with their eyes on the sky. He could hear the snorting of the lean red does, concerned as to the welfare of their fawns, as they moved uneasily about the higher slopes. He could hear the whistling "wheu, wheu, wheu, wheu," of wild ducks' wings stampeding about the sky, and the full, wild, ringing alarm note of the curlews, the tocsin of the wild, pealed incessantly from every hill. Once it seemed to him that he heard the snorting of a horse, but when he reached the post there was no horse there, nor ever had been, but a vixen to look upon, and in place

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of hoof marks, he found—Oh, murder!—those unspeakable claw-marks.

Then he hurried to the fowl-house of that farm and got in by some miraculous contriving of his own and slew a fowl quickly, much to the disgust of a stoat who was planning the same coup. He fed after his fashion—his ruddy orbs gleaming in the darkness, which was full of blundering, half-



CHOKED THE CRY THAT WOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM
AWAY

awake fowls—and removed again with speed. At the entrance he ran up against something that was coming in, and it turned and opened its mouth to squeal, but he leaped at its throat and choked the cry that would have given him away. It was a rat.

There was a clap like thunder as he took

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the gap in the rough yard-wall at a bound, and a hail of leaden shot spattered the lichened stone slabs behind him. That is the worst of fowls and pigs; they simply will not die quietly, but scream till someone, or death, or both, arrives to stop them. Apparently the farmer had heard them and had fired from the bedroom window at the long, low shadow of the polecat as it crossed the yard. At least, that was the supposition, but the polecat did not go back to see.

Instead, he heard the snorting of that horse, which wasn't a horse, again, proceeding this time from an inky black smudge of fir trees, and he arrived home hot and desperate an hour before dawn, wondering how he got there. The "cairn" was deserted at this hour, for its inhabitants, who were all beasts without the law, carried on business under shadow of night only.

The polecat family's own particular den in the "cairn" seemed hollow and lonely, and, knowing that his wife would not be back till dawn, he lay down just within the mouth of the hole to wait. In times of

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peace he would have slept where he lay, but he was ill at ease this night.

The tocsin of the curlews still pealed from hill to answering hill, and the blackness, now that the moon had gone, was terrifying. A gray shadow, long and low, grew out of the void and faded into the "cairn." Another shadow followed. 'Twas the badgers almost an hour before their time. Something blew past with a snort, and a gleam as of a dim lamp marked the passing of the light rump of a roe-deer. Behind came a second, and they were in a hurry, fearful and highstrung, ready to shoot off at a tangent at a whisper. And the roe is the last of the wild folk to become flurried.

A suspicion of faintest gray hazed the east, and a rock about ten yards away grew into a rock instead of a crouching goblin which the darkness had made it. Dawn was at hand. And straightway there rose up out of the dirt the lean, slinking, raking figure of the fox. He had come home, like the badgers, long before his time, and he had

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come on his belly, and went to ground as if he thanked Heaven for the favor. And the polecat, watching with his wicked, snaky head erect, knew by these tokens that the shadow of the white nightmare—and the same with the claw-mark mystery—lay heavy upon all the wild.

No blackcock announced dawn on the rock near by, as was his custom on other mornings. No jays shattered the silence with harsh, unseemly gibes. No grouse slung themselves in whirring showers across the valleys. No heron sailed up out of the black woods into the cauldron of the fiery sunrise, into which it was his wont to beat slowly until the glare engulfed him. All these things were missing this morning, and so was the polecat's wife and her young one. Only the everlasting tocsin of the curlews beat to and fro without pause.

At last the polecat stood up and moved stiffly away into the spruce-fir wood. A cry, half-stifled by distance, had come to him on the lap of the dawn wind. It was not a nice cry, a thin, high chatter, but it was the

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cry of a polecat for help, and it is one of the rules of all the weasels that that cry must be answered in person and at once. They are not, from the human point of view, desirable beasts, nor is there anything lovable about them, but they will rescue a comrade from a foe if they can, even if their own life pays forfeit—and that in itself is not half bad.

He found the giver of that cry, and it was his wife. Beside her was their only and half-grown son. Both were carmine stained about the back, looking as if they had tried to crawl under some barbed wire, and they were in trouble so that they made obscene noises at nothing at all.

He was wondering in his dull animal way what they imagined they were fighting, when his eyes fell upon that which had once been a grouse, and beside it—was that unmentionable claw-mark. That explained it all. The attitude of the wild folk, the tocsin of the curlews, the silence, the——

A shadow fell athwart the sun. His eyes lifted, and he was still. Above him, poised on vast flapping wings, which, contrary to

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the custom of all wings, made no sound, was a bird, and it must have been twenty-six inches from head to tail if it was an inch. It was white as the snow, that bird, cruel as the snow, silent as the snow, and it was literally muffled from big round head to tiger-taloned claws with layers upon layers of feathers.

Then it fell, fell with the suddenness and force of a bolt and the polecat went down under it with a yell. What happened under that white heap, amid the terrible grappling claws, no one knows, for the heap choked suddenly and collapsed in a coughing white whirlwind.

“It was a snowy owl from Russia,” said the keeper to me. “I found it lying dead on top of a dead polecat. The polecat’s jaws were locked tight in the owl’s throat, in a blind, accidental death-grip, and two other polecats ran away as I approached.”

Which lucid statement, you will allow, explained everything about the mystery, which in the wild had become known as “The White Nightmare.”

THE MASTER ROGUE

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“And he left him, grim and sulky,
Sitting in the morning sunshine,

• • • •
Croaking fiercely his displeasure,
Flapping his great sable pinions.”

(“Hiawatha.”)

BUT I protest that he would have been completely and entirely out of place in any other setting. Given an eighteen hundred foot ramp, the last four hundred feet atop a sheer wall of dull gray, bearded with age-old moss, riven and gashed and furrowed by the storms of a thousand years; given a river—a silver snake alive—crawling at bottom, fed by a dozen tiny silver threads, spangled with bursts and puffs of rainbow vapors where the waterfalls spouted and sent up all together a confused murmur like unto the murmur of an ants’

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city in a pinewood on a June day; given a
black smudge of pine, a green slash of larch,
a blotch of dull gold where the bracken lay,



A SINGLE FANG OF ROCK, CROWNED ATOP WITH
HIM, A BLACK SPECK YOU COULD SEE
MILES AWAY

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on the opposite slope; given a single kite sweeping the flank of a mile-long, dim ridge, half smothered in rain squalls; given a silence profound as the silence of the deep, accentuated and focused by the single strokes of an ax very far away, and given on the brow of the ridge a single fang of rock crowned atop with him, a black speck you could see miles away, motionless, austere, sinister—a raven. Would you have had him otherwise?

Though motionless, he was concerned as to his mate, her nest. When in these days of order—and *collectors*—you are an outlaw, when you are rare enough to be sought, and more especially, when you wear the black livery which is the heritage of the crows and the badge of robbery, pillage, and murder, it behooves you to “look to your tents.” His mate would have a nest, and he would have her have a nest, but—there is many a slip ’twixt the egg and the chick, and well he knew it.

No man knew the age of that raven. No man knows the age of any raven. All I

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know is that by any standard of age he was old. Yet the age stopped at the name—always excepting wickedness, of course. In all else was he young, in his prime, keen, alert, watchful, confident, sure and quite adequate—a force to be reckoned with by the wild folk of the place.

In dress he was slovenly; his wings hung, feathers were out of place. His beak was a coal-hammer, no less; his carriage the carriage of the swashbuckler, and in the eye—the cruel, insolently humorous eye—was the leer of evil, not without courage, made manifest.

Yes, he would nest. There was, apparently, no hurry; time for philosophic thought. Your wild folk, except possibly starlings, never hurry, by the way. All the same they get through more in a day than the average man does in a week.

At last he rose—it was like the lifting of a black thought—shook out his great wings to the accompaniment of the stiff rustling of feathers, and cast himself into the void. The rasp as those wings bit the air told of

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power. Yet there was nothing of the "gallery" in his flight. He flew to get there, and it was not till a howling maniacal gust of wind swept down the mountain-side upon him that one realized the strength of him. He was not concerned at all. He did not go tearing away like a blown leaf to windward, as the other birds did. He was not obliged to back and tack. He did not find need to hug the ground to make headway. He just kept straight on without concern, apparently also—but this can hardly have been the case—without trouble.

From time to time he did a strange thing—strange for so sober a flyer. He threw himself upon his back and allowed himself to fall in that position, stone wise, only to recover and beat forward again without hesitation—I had almost said without a smile.

Anon he came to a horrible place. The cliff appeared to have been cut off with a giant knife, and one looked over its face, two hundred feet sheer, into nothing. Here, one thought, he will build his nest, for it was

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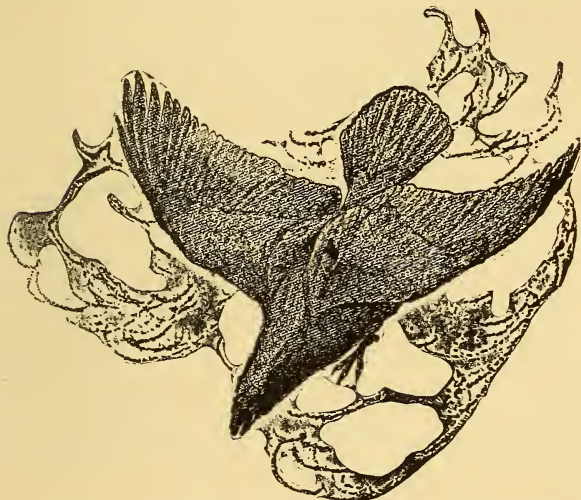
a safe place—for a raven's nest, I mean. But no. He went mad instead, or, at least it appeared as if he did. He must needs choose a tree, a bare, wind-harried affair, standing some half-dozen yards from the cliff's edge and there start his nest. The madness came in the fact that any good climber could reach it there, whereas on the only other ledge, half a hundred feet down the cliff's face, he would have been safe from even the collector's agent.

Presently something said "Cruck! Cruck!" in a hollow voice that savored of the tomb, and his mate dropped, a black shadow, from the clouds. Then together they labored.

That was a mad nest building, because the cock-bird, for all his somber mien, found it necessary to dance a crazy dance from time to time, uttering the while dolorous ravings, and to cast himself back at the cliff's edge and laugh hollow croaks to think that, by consummate recovery and skill, he cheated the buzzards who hung expectant to see him scattered on the rocks below. Then,

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as if the picture were not sufficiently arresting, the sun must needs set behind them and, igniting the sky aflame, turn both birds into coal devils, on a coal tree, performing con-



HIS MATE DROPPED A BLACK SHADOW FROM
THE CLOUDS

tortions above a cliff of coal—all in silhouette against a silently raging furnace.

The dawning found them hard at it—purple goblins now, against a sky of perfect pink, floating on blue gray and purple mists

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—for the nest-building of the raven is no sparrow's task. A wheel-barrow load of sticks alone, each stick tested separately for flaws, rot, and damp, comprise the outer works of the black one's castle, and these, gathered singly, often from great distance, are not easy to collect.

About noon a speck—as it were an ant crawling up the opposite hill—appeared far below. Anon it stopped and was still—the ant had discovered a grain, perhaps. But it was no ant. It was a man, a collector's agent, which, though larger, was scarcely of greater worth than the ant he appeared to be. He was gazing through binoculars, prismatic binoculars to be exact, and when the nest came within their "field" he smiled.

The great black birds needed no binoculars to show them this scourge in detail, and they smiled, too. I swear they did, or was it a passing cloud shadow that made them appear to smirk, or a gull skimming high overhead that laughed?

Day after day that ant-like speck crawled

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aslant the opposite slope and leered a lustful leer through binoculars at the nest, and day after day one or other raven labored thereat, calling down maledictions on all collectors and their brood, and daily the nest grew from a notch to a bunch, from a bunch to a skeleton castle, and from that to a—landmark. And the agent grinned—he was very young, that agent. This was his first dealing with the king of the black fraternity. On the other hand the ravens, they were very old. I do not know how old, but certainly old. Now the raven is born a child of the devil. With the years his cunning and knowledge of evil increases, and the getting the better of him is likely to fall neither to the young nor to the head-strong. No flies settle on your raven, if it please you.

Thus our collector's agent forgot, or lacked the brains to notice, that after a space, one bird only of the pair took part in this nest building. To him the one bird was just a raven, but, as a matter of fact, it was sometimes the cock and sometimes the hen—and many of the sticks used to make that

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nest were rotten. They would not stand a gale with the weight of a full-grown hen raven atop for ten minutes, to say nothing of the brood that should come. Now, bird never did, nor ever will, build nest with rotten sticks.

The British Government's "Nitro Proof" test for guns is no more drastic than the test to which birds put each single component part of their nursery. Still the human scourge grinned the vacuous grin of the ignorant. Certainly that nest building was very late. Even he knew that it was full time for ravens to have laid all their eggs by now. Nevertheless he consoled himself with the thought that here was the nest and here were the birds. Barring accidents, therefore, it was almost mathematically certain that here at the appointed time would be eggs also.

On the fifth day—or it may have been the seventh, I forget—our raven left his nest-building about the hour of noon. He was aware, for one thing, of his good lady's restlessness and bad temper and, for another

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thing, of a voice within himself. It was a voice which with him, as with all birds, was rarely still—the voice of hunger. He would feed.

Now where on earth in all that wild scene should a respectable old gentleman turn his black beak to feed? He soared along at a great height over the wonderful landscape till he came to a wood of deep, restful green, all a-shimmer in the sunshine and all astir with the restless wind that ran in following waves across its bosom. The wood was of oak, flung carpet-wise across the shoulder of an ample hill, and there were sun-washed spaces between the trees, fringed with the brittle bracken, guarded by delicate tracery of hawthorn, bearded with clinging briars, and dimpled and patched with lawns of pure green, where deer fed and rabbits nibbled warily—exactly as oaks love to have it.

Our raven hove to on a great bare limb on the edge of one of these peaceful spaces, quietly, unostentatiously, as if unwilling to break the peace of so perfect a picture.

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There was nothing at all in his manner to warn one of what was coming. He just beamed on the clearing with the complacent air of a benevolent old gentleman watching the gambols of his grandchildren. He had, indeed, quite a fatherly look, our raven.

A mile away, he knew, his wife, following his course, had dropped to a like scene, with one roving eye on the world in general and the other turned in his direction in case he needed help.

A buck—not horned now—came out into the naked sunlight and stared up at him for a moment before passing on. A thrush flew to the top of a hawthorn and told the world of his love that was assuredly born of melody, and a blackbird put him to shame with that lazy mastery of the perfect song which is all the blackbird's very own. A gay finch flaunted his gold against the sun on a whitethorn, and a single cock pheasant came out and posed for a bronze statue in the warm rays.

In the shadows under the low boughs there were hints of dim lamps coming and

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going, which marked the passage of the white rumps of the elusive roe-deer, and once a gaunt dog-fox, tongue-lolling, eyes a-grin, came out to roll, but thought better of it and went away. Rabbits dotted the place everywhere; and, as they began to forget the coming of the raven, all the birds lifted up their voices—the mid-day hymn in this cathedral of a thousand pillars.

The raven looked on and seemed almost to beam his kindly approval of such innocent delight of the wood-folk. One almost forgot the warning of his color as one beheld him at that moment, so peaceful and content his air.

Suddenly was silence. It was as if a finger had been laid on Nature's lips, and a whisper sighed through the glades breathing one word—"Silence." But it was not silence the whisper said. It was "Death." A swift shadow shot across the clearing and all was, as it were, crystallized. Nothing moved. Nothing spoke.

Every bird and every small beast "froze," while the maker of that shadow, a hawk,

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clipper built, constructed on racing lines, sailed above, took a turn, sailed again, and slid on over the far trees. He had seen nothing because nothing had moved. Dozens of birds—all prey to him—really came under that sheathed glance, but they were “frozen,” and so he saw them not. Only man, it seems, possesses the power of eliminating the “frozen” wild folk from their



harmonious surroundings, and not every man at that, either.

In a few minutes Nature spoke again, and song poured forth, and all went about upon his or her business as before.

The raven waited on. His air was no less placid, no whit less innocent, than before, but he was aware of an



A BUCK—NOT HORNED
NOW—CAME OUT INTO
THE NAKED SUNLIGHT
AND STARED UP AT
HIM.

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increasing aching void in his innards all the same. The ravens, however, have built up their success of species on the text: "He that believeth shall not make haste," and good reason had he to believe.

There is the patience of the cat waiting for a mouse, and there is the patience of the eagle motionless on its pinnacle, and there is another patience of the pike waiting, head to stream, at the tail of the mill-race, but the patience of the vulture and the raven exceedeth all these. To the cat and the eagle and the pike is only the uncertainty of the chase, but to the vulture and the raven is the most certain thing of all—death. Therefore they wait on, they believe and do not make haste, knowing that in the end all things must come to them. They have, as it were, the last word. Only man has upset their plans. He will neither die decently in the open, nor let them live. You will find, however, that wherever man does let them live, treating them as scavengers, they are the most numerous of all birds—the waiting game pays.

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Fifteen slow, languorous minutes dropped by, and during that time our raven imitated very passably an image carved out of the very jet. Then something moved.

A rabbit came out into the clearing, and it was in trouble so that it could not refrain from giving a helpless, baby-like squeal. Instantly there was no living thing in the clearing, only the rabbit that dragged itself forward as one afflicted with paralysis, and the raven still as a pond.

Anon came another thing. Very long, and very low was this thing, so that to progress it moved in leaps, rippling over the grass snakily. It was brown as autumn leaves are brown, and its eyes shone red in a flat head, the shape of a wedge. The raven looked again and saw it was a stoat.

The rabbit made no effort to avert the death that followed. It dragged and squealed till the stoat fell upon it and delivered the fatal death-bite of all the weasels, the swift severing of the vertebrae at the base of the skull.

For a few seconds after the murder the

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raven was aware of the stoat's beady eyes fixed upon himself. Then he was aware of their quick shifting to something else above, and at the same instant a bolt seemed to fall from the sky. The stoat did not so much go, as be gone. On a second was a stoat above a rabbit. The next second the rabbit was still there, but there was no stoat, not so much as a hair of his tail. Only, in his place stood a big buzzard, and the raven had no distinct recollection how on earth he got there, except that he must have had some connection with the falling of the bolt from the blue.

Up to this point, as you will perceive, the raven had taken no part in the play. Now, however, he spoke—it was the voice of the vaulted tomb—and announced his intention to claim his dues. The buzzard had its back turned to him at the moment, but that did not prevent it from yanking its head clean round and fixing him with its stabbing stare in that uncanny way peculiar to eagles and their allies.

Also it replied. Now the appearance of

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the buzzard is regal. One might almost mistake the bird for an eagle—when the eagle was not by. Therefore, when it replied in a thin, peevish mew that would have disgraced a three weeks' old kitten, one felt surprise. But the raven took no notice. He went down to the rabbit like a knight charging, beak held straight out as a lance in rest. And the buzzard—remembered an appointment. It had apparently no more heart than the rabbit it would eat. Came later—the single croak must have called her—the raven's mate, and the two dined in their own peculiar way, which is not our way by any means.

It was an hour after that, when the afternoon had set in wet and squally, that we find them flying low over the shoulder of a grim, naked hill not a quarter of a mile from their nest. But they were not going to their nest. They went, instead, to a ghastly place. It was as if a titanic shell had burst on the crest of the hill, rending and tearing out a gash two hundred feet deep.

The walls sloped outward, bulged hor-

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ribly; the bottom was filled as to half its area by a bottomless pool—at least, the folk of those parts said it was bottomless—and it was tenanted entirely by a wind that sighed and sighed forever through a rift in the ramp of its sides, and by nothing else at all. There were, however, bones at the bottom among the strewn rocks on one side, so death, if not life, visited there. And the Gorge of Death called they this place of horror.

The ravens shot over the giddy edge of the cliff, slid like black meteors down the sickening drop, and vanished over the bulge before spoken of, exactly over the spot where the bones—they were the bones of lambs—lay one hundred feet beneath. And they did not return. Night came on, and they failed to show.

If, however, any had been out at that stark hour when night pales to day one might have seen the cock raven beating heavily overland to this spot, and he bore a burden, the leg of a lamb. No, he did not kill the lamb. He found it dead. I don't

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know how he came by the leg, though, without the rest.

For once he hurried, and literally toppled over that awful cliff, swept out in a hissing curve, and vanished down under.

Now it was that morning that the collector's agent chose to rob the raven's nest. It had been completed some little while now, and he rarely came to the spot to watch without finding one or other bird about the place. He concluded there were eggs. You picture him, toiling up the slope from the valley below, growing from an ant to a fly, and from a fly to a beetle, and from a beetle to an irregular smudge half submerged in heather.

All the world knew he was coming; those on the crest of the hill a mile above him were aware of his progress without looking. Any could say, pointing, with shut eyes:—"He is here. He is there. Now he is by the old peat pool. Now he crosses the stream." Indeed, who could not know? Were there not a dozen voices shouting it out to the tops of the immemorial hills?

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Now it was the curlew—the spirit of the waste—weaving space mazes and yelling lost yells; now it was a buzzard, a wheeling speck in the infinite, whispering “See-uu!



NOW IT WAS THE CURLEW—THE SPIRIT OF THE
WASTE—WEAVING SPACE MAZES AND YELLING
LOST YELLS

See-uu!” Anon it would be a cock grouse,
important and querulous, or a blue hare

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making a living streak of itself up to and over the brow, saying nothing at all, but speaking much in action, or possibly a golden plover, shocked and excitable, dashing about the sky, whistling mournfully. All spoke the same words, though in many languages:—"He comes. Man comes. To cover! To cover."

A red fox, the last of the night hunters to go to lair, paused a moment to watch with sharp, cunning eyes the incarnation of his hatred stumbling two rifle shots below him; a restless stag detached himself from his surrounding and removed over the hill crest with cynical displeasure, and a bustling blackcock—goodness and its lyre-tailed self know what it was doing there—got up with a shocking commotion and hurtled down into the valley bullet-wise.

The hen raven peered over the edge of the nest, cocked her head on one side, eyed the marauder with her one unforgettable eye—she had lost the other over the matter of a slight miscalculation of gun-shot range—and made a remark. The cock—he was

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sitting on a honey-colored cairn of boulders—replied in suitable obscene criticism of the man thing, and—I like to think of his doing this because it was so human in the light of after events and proved him the born actor that he was—danced an unholy dance of rage. He lifted his wings, and with them half open above his back, executed—always looking at his toes—a sort of crazy Highland “fling.”

Meanwhile the man climbed slowly, one eye on the nest, the other on the ground, till at last he was within eighty yards of the tree. Came then a rush as the hen raven bundled herself bodily up from the nest, and her mate joining her you could hear the stiff rustle of their shadowing wings at that distance—hurled aloft, to swoop and croak awful things.

Presently they fetched up on a rock a couple of hundred yards off and watched the man fix his rope and put on his climbing-irons beneath the tree. He was sure of his eggs now. Had he not beheld the hen-bird sit tight till the very last moment?

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They watched, and our raven was magnificent throughout. He became rage made manifest. He tore up grass with his beak; he danced as on hot plates; he swooped at a crew of vulgar-mouthed jackdaws and all but slew one of the luckless footpads that he cut off from the flock; he soared up to the ultimate dim clouds because the shadow of a kestrel crossed his path, and the little falcon, thinking to mock him with her more exquisite wing-power, played about him as a terrier does a cow, till in an unguarded moment she came too near and failed to clear his streaking rush. She fell in consequence to earth. The fall had killed her, but it was not the fall that had all but cut her head from her shoulders.

The climbing of that tree was a slow and painful job. It was rotten as a toadstool in October. (Did you ever known a raven build on a rotten tree, or rook on a rotten elm? No, nor I). The collector's agent should have known too, but he kept on. Times he swore as branch after branch snapped like a pistol shot under his grasp,

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and times he panted too hard to swear, by reason of the effort. Yet he never guessed.

At last he could put his hand over the edge of the nest—he was breathing hard now and grinning a triumphant grin—could, with another hoist and an extra wriggle, feel within the tips of his fingers, and——

At that moment the collector's agent became aware of a sudden stillness. Not a thing stirred. The ravens were silent. No creature spoke on earth or in sky. His heart seemed to stand still. The smile was still on his face, parodied. He gave a mighty heave. A beetle in the nest might have seen his face as it peered over, set in a sickly grin. But the beetle was busy dodging the clutching fingers, and vanished. The vacuous face of the grin remained, staring, staring, staring—the nest was empty. It had, as a matter of fact, never been anything else. And the ravens were gone. The collector's agent discovered that when he looked round. They had disappeared, probably when he first noticed the sudden

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silence, and he—was done—duped—had—fooled—bluffed.

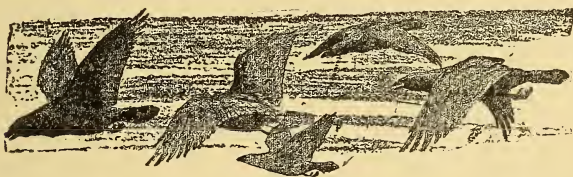
The nest was a dummy, and he had wasted his time watching it for the major part of a month. Then that collector's agent descended from that tree as swiftly as might be, and upon the ground below he, in turn, danced his dance. Mad as the raven's dance was his, a grotesque and weird series of contortions, and as he danced, his clenched fists were raised above his head, even as the raven's wings had been, and he cursed those ravens by all the powers of darkness and by the devil, their master, and by a hundred and one other things as well.

But the ravens did not care—not they. They were sitting just under the bulging, unclimbable, leaning ramp of the side of the Gorge of Death a quarter of a mile away. On the edge of their nest sat they, a huge nest, strong and well made, tucked snugly into a perfect ledge, anchored on century-old ivy and strengthened by years of perfecting here and there, there and here. No man could reach them here. Above was the

THE MASTER ROGUE

bulging cliff, like a giant's breast, and below—a sheer hundred feet drop to the surface of the bottomless pool, and Heaven alone knows how many feet drop below that.

They did not care. Why should they? They were contemplating fondly as fine a brood of three healthy, lusty young ravens as ever opened their beaks to the rising sun for food on a spring morning. The last had only been hatched that day, but in due time



SAW FIVE GREAT BLACK RAVENS BEATING OVER THE
SUBLIME GRIM, BLUNT SHOULDERS OF THE HILLS

the last flew. And in the autumn, when the winds howled, bringing the Arctic wildfowl down in strings across a ragged sky, shepherds, going to their work of a morning, saw five great black ravens beating over the sublime, grim, blunt shoulders of the hills and they would nod and grunt to themselves something about:

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

“ I’m thinking the oold ’un’s mighty fly. They’ve reared another muckle broodie of bairns there against the world an’ a’.”

And the buzzards whom the collector’s agent had looted of their eggs before he departed weaved mazes in and out among the tattered reek of the clouds, mewing weak-hearted protests at the great black birds and wondering how they had done the trick. But the ravens said no word. They raided, and they risked, and despoiled, and pillaged, and pirated after the immemorial custom of ravens all the world over, and they never told anybody their secret.

Only the ring-ouzel—he who had nested by the bottomless pool, under the very robber’s stronghold—knew, and he told me, what time an October gale flung him exhausted at midnight on my window-sill some hundreds of miles south of the raven’s home. I took him in and, as he sat on the hearth-rug, his jet form a smeared patch on the red stuff, turned to ruby and all manner of “shot” colors beneath the blaze—alternately sipping whisky and milk from a

THE MASTER ROGUE

spoon and stretching his chilled wings to the blaze, while I dozed in the arm-chair, lulled by the howling storm, he told the tale to me as the price of his life.

At least, I like to think he did—and yet—and yet! What would you? The hot room, the cold night, the storm without, the hour, the stillness above the storm—perhaps I dozed and it was a dream after all. Who knows? The ring-ouzel does, but he is thousands of miles away now in tropical Africa, or wherever it is ring-ouzels are pleased to winter. And probably I shall never see him again. And he—he will never be able to prove the truth of what I have said.

THE SAINT

THE SAINT

“Be as one who knoweth and yet holdeth his tongue.”

BARTLET swears he had nothing to do with it, and Macgregor says nothing at all, and Brown, the animal tamer of Benchell's Menagerie, whistles when you ask him about it. Nevertheless, as Blatant Hardway, Esq., pointed out, the facts looked very fishy, very fishy indeed.

The facts of the case are odd—Benchell's Menagerie went to the town of Aberdath by road. In his cage in the last van of the procession was “the Saint.” Somewhere, as near as might be, at the point where the road to Aberdath runs for two miles through the demi semi strictly preserved moor and forest known as Glenskye, the property of Blatant Hardway, Esq. (acquired by mortgage, by the way), the Saint escaped, got out of his cage and ran away into the gath-

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

ering night, and no one knew anything about it till after the arrival at Aberdath, when Brown, red in the face and perspiring, ran to Benchell with the broken lock of the Saint's cage in his hands and winged words in his mouth. It was evident that the jolting of the cart—it was a vile road—or the teeth of the Saint, or both, had broken the lock.

“But where?” roared Benchell. “It's not the 'ow of it, Brown, it's the where.”

“God knows,” said Brown. “An' somebody else will before mornin', if I knows the Saint.”

Then a vision of the Saint careering across Scotland on his own seemed to strike both men together. Benchell put his hand over his mouth and went away, and Brown put his hand over his mouth and his handkerchief in it and went the other way.

There was no attempt made to recapture the Saint. He was entered in the books of the menagerie as “Sold.” Nor was anyone living enlightened further on the matter either then or thereafter.

THE SAINT

Now, Hardway's Glenskye marched with Bartlet's Glenask moor, and the two were rivals for the record game bag for all northern Scotland, and Smythe, Hardway's head-keeper, had that season by means which are said to have been crooked enticed the bulk of Bartlet's birds over the border with the result that Glenskye beat its own record bag, and Glenask was nowhere. Naturally Macgregor, who was Bartlet's head-keeper, had sworn vengeance.

These things happened before the looming of Benchell and his menagerie upon the horizon. Now, where Hardway makes his point is this: his man, Smythe, had seen Macgregor and Brown in deep conversation in the private, or back, parlor of an obscure local "pub" shortly before closing time, and Macgregor was plying Brown with many and wonderful drinks, drinks quite beyond Mac's power to pay for. That was at 10:30 P. M. and at 4:00 P. M., or as near as may be, on the following evening the Saint escaped.

So far all seems clear. What followed was not so clear, for obvious reasons.

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Smythe certainly knows spots and dashes of it, as it were. The whole real story, however, is locked up in the secret history of the wild, whence, because of one or two services rendered to wild folk, I got it—it came to me, you understand. The merlin, smallest of falcons, he told me some of it what time I warned him of danger; the “father of cunning,” the old gray fox, added more when I freed him one day from a trap; and “wise one,” the long-eared owl, filled in what the others had left out when I lay observing nature in a pine-wood during the long, scented stillness of a moonlit night.

You picture the Saint putting all the yards between himself and Benchell and all his works that was possible. Anyone not knowing him might have mistaken him for a “Teddy bear” with a much worn disreputable mop of a tail added. Tail and head pointed at the ground; the back arched like the back of pussy when she spots a dog; the feet were set down flat like hands, or bears’ feet; there was a glint of longish white claws, and they rattled on stones; the coat of rusty

THE SAINT

brown-black looked as if it were being shed, only that was its permanent state; the gait of him was his own, none other shared it, it was an out-at-heels, disreputable, part gallop, part trot, part anything you please, and the whole appearance of him was of the shades shady. This one saw as he removed.

Then, after a certain time, he stopped and looked round; and one saw his face, and——! It was not a face of this earth at all. It was the face of a nightmare, a very bad nightmare, the visage of a strayed fiend who never ought to have been allowed above ground at all, even by night. Black it was and with a dog-like snout; lips raised in an evil leer just enough to hint at the steely fangs beneath; a low, brutal brow, and eyes, as of tiny coals smouldering, in which lurked all the hate of all the wild-folk against man concentrated into one brain, and something else, not hate, but a knowledge and cunning which it is not right for any beast to possess.

To be quite exact, he was a wolverene, or glutton from Russia, a beast of the weasel tribe, though not in the least like a weasel,

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

being in size and in looks half-way between a bear and a badger. Thus the Saint as he appeared on the surface. Comes now that part of him which lay beneath the surface.

He stopped, he looked round, he scratched, and then with a growl at nothing in particular—or it may have been some memory of Brown—he hurried on. The flame of the setting sun smouldered and went out; a pale moon peeped wonderingly over a rocky ridge; the bats wove delicate mazy patterns against the white moon's face; the last grouse had ceased to crow, the last blackcock had gone back to the frowning woods; a stag roared suddenly, bursting, as it were, the heavy silences of the place, and another farther up the mountain-side answered, coughing hoarsely, and although the first stag was himself hidden behind a clump of heather, you could see the funneled steam of his breath shoot out from the cover as he roared.

After a time the Saint came to a pool and stopped short. It was not the almost sacred beauty of the place that held him; not

THE SAINT

the frosted silver pool set deep in purple ramparts; not the sight of the old gray mountain-fox, a beautifully moulded form thrown in silhouette against the frosted silver; nor the roebuck which stood at gaze on a rock higher up so that just his antlered head was ringed by the moon—mounted, as it were, against the moon. None of these things gave him pause. The scent of grouse asleep held him rigid, a family of grouse, full-feathered and ready for shooting.

Then the Saint moved from place to place very quickly, and there were horrible sounds as of flutterings and bird cries of “Murder!” Marvelously quick were the movements of the Saint for so clumsy looking a beast—a bound here, a slash there, a crunch somewhere else, and then silence. The grouse had gone, all but four. Those four remained, blasted from life almost before they knew it.

The fox, after the first bound of alarm, turned and viewed the thicket whence came the sounds of murder by night. Vermin were scarce on Glenskye by reason of many

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

traps. He came to the conclusion, therefore, that this must be the work of a polecat that had wandered down from the mountains. He would investigate. Who cared for a polecat?—besides one might bully him out of his own “kill.”

You know the rules of the stalk as laid down in fox-lore; how you must crawl belly-flat, how you must place each foot down separately and without noise, and how you must use every stone, every bush, every blade of grass ever to screen you? Well, the old gray fox did all this, and yet, when with infinite caution he had got to cover, he—fell backwards and went away in a hurry. He found the Saint open-mouthed and terrible in a setting of corpses and feathers. The Saint was quite ready for him, was expecting him, had, in fact, been cognizant of the stalk from the very first. No wonder the fox went away. It is not every day one comes across beasts that can foresee the stalk of foxes.

The Saint fed the first good feed he had tasted since Fate in the shape of a trap had

THE SAINT

taken him from his native wilds of Russia half a year ago. Then he drank, cleaned from head to heel—even he could not disobey this the strictest of nature's laws—and ambled off. A dozen pairs of furtive eyes watched him go, a dozen alert moist muzzles came and sniffed inquiringly at his tracks after his passing, for in the wild there are always those that watch and are never seen. But the Saint, what did he care? Few he knew could face him in open combat, and in cunning none at all.

He moved slightly uphill, our wolverene, to the roughest places, the most ghostly gorges, the most bristly thickets, the blackest pines, the most frowning cliffs, the angriest streams that leaped half their course in clean drops, and galloped the rest. He prowled here by instinct I suppose, for he could not have known that here alone he would have a fair working chance to survive in the days to come, nor that this was the wildest spot on all the moors in that whole country.

He was now in the heart of the most

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

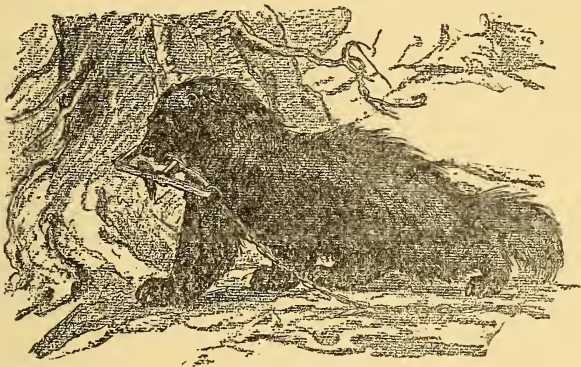
strictly preserved estate in Scotland. Only a stray stag was shot here occasionally, for the grouse was king, the blackcock his Heir Apparent, the capercailzie his Prime Minister, the pheasant Governor of the Lower Levels, and the gay mallard and gayer teal Pages in Waiting. There were, also, rabbits. Vermin here were scarcer than strawberries in winter. There were, as we have seen, a few patriarchs at the game, but the great majority found many inducements to stay away. The Saint discovered one of these inducements as he shambled his own particular shamble through the glens. Then the trouble began.

Suddenly, without any reason that you could see, the Saint's fur sat up all along his back, and he sat down on his ragged tail. His snout pointed straight at the ground like an accusing finger, and there was a look in his eyes that was distinctly dangerous. To the human eye he appeared to be snatching at gnats. Nothing in the way of danger could lie along the soft carpet of moss that formed his path. So said his eyes

THE SAINT

also, but his nose told another story. His nose spelt out the ominous word "steel."

Presently you see him walking in infinitely cautious circles round this spot. Then, having marked the danger point, he started to dig swiftly and angrily. He dug



HE CARRIED IT TWO HUNDRED YARDS AWAY AND
HID IT PAST ALL HOPE OF FINDING IN THE
BOWELS OF A HOLLOW TREE

with the air of one not altogether new to this game, and at the end of the dig was a chain, and at the end of the chain was a steel trap, jaws set ready for work, and the whole contrivance was most artfully concealed beneath the innocent carpet of moss.

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Then was seen in what manner the Saint differed from all other beasts. The dragging of the trap out of its hiding place by the chain had sprung it and the cruel metallic snap of its jaws was the signal for a kind of madness on the part of the Saint. He became in appearance more fiendish than ever, and he gave himself up to venting fury upon that trap in a human and ghastly manner. Then he carried it two hundred yards away and hid it past all hope of finding in the bowels of a hollow tree—*hid* it, I said, he who was only an animal.

“God knows, and someone else will by morning, if I know the Saint,” Brown had said, and that showed that the animal tamer was at least a man of discernment. Deeper and deeper the wolverene slouched into the heart of the preserve, and his progress was one of marvelous actions. Carefully following the track of the keeper who had set the first trap, he unearthed others—goodness and his extraordinary self knew how he discovered them—to the number of twelve.

THE SAINT

Each of these he pulled up, "threw," carried off, and hid. In the case of one trap, he found a miserable stoat therein. Him he killed and partly consumed, leaving the remainder of the carcass as an insolent reminder to any whom it might concern that he, the Saint, had passed that way.

Thence he passed—always ascending slowly, through ranked and serried larch, or black cathedrals of stately pine—to the level of the upper moors. This was the big beat, the grand beat, the place where Blatant Hardway, Esq., and his friends shooting from butts, were wont to make their record one day's bag for all northern Scotland.

You will understand that in Russia one eats, as one lives, under more than one restriction—and the wolverene had come, not willingly, from Russia. Famine to him was something more than a name merely. He had met famine face to face. So had all his fellow wild-folk of those parts, and that made them both scarce and wary. If he wanted a meal, and he was of that tribe who

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

live under a curse of eternally wanting meals, he had to work for it.

Therefore, when he issued out upon the high moor—a long, squat, menacing shape stealing in the shadows that lay beneath the crests of the waves of that purple sea of heather—and found grouse in hundreds he—well, he lost his head I suppose. You know the feeling that comes over a school-boy who finds himself let loose in a pastry-shop, or of a man who after years of poverty finds himself suddenly wealthy? Something of that feeling must have assailed the Saint at the sight of a hunting-ground the fatness of which was beyond his wildest ideas.

There is no official return to show the extent of the damage done by that one beast on the high moor in that single night between midnight and an hour before dawn. That he gorged to repletion and continued slaying after gorging simply for the love of the thing is evident. Not that the wolverene is exactly an agile beast, as agility is counted in the wild, but the grouse

THE SAINT

were so pampered, so fat, so spoiled by the fostering of man that it was mere child's work for a hardened hunter like himself to slay and slay and go on slaying till morning. The fox speaks of a vision of him red-eyed, red-fanged, threatening, gliding and darting with unexpected swiftness among the twisted heather stems; the long-eared owl tells of how he alone counted ten grouse lying dead and uneaten in the path of the Saint, and the merlin has it that he beheld the keeper next dawn pick up five more, and goodness knows how many more were overlooked.

But though mad for the time being, the Saint was no fool. An hour before dawn found no Saint, or rather it found him at the bottom of an all-but impassable gorge, at the end of a ten-foot cleft of rock two feet above a perfectly insane waterfall with a fifty-foot drop, and a pool of, for all I know, more than fifty foot depth below. The hanging rainbow vapor of the fall hid the cleft entirely, the gnarled roots of a single towering Scotch fir had rent him an obscure

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back passage in case his exit in front were cut off, and in order that any pursuer should not find all this too easy, it was necessary to make at least four, and possibly five, giddy leaps from rock to rock above the maniacal waters to get to the cleft.

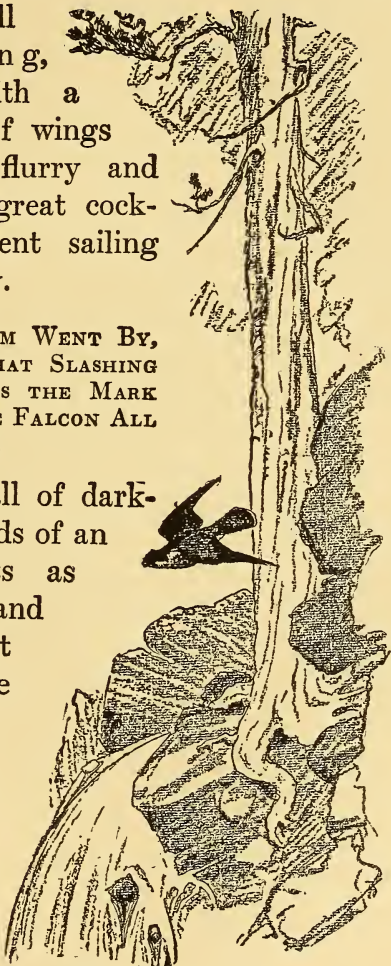
All that day the Saint slept, lulled by the roar of the fall and the ceaseless chatter of moving waters, while sapphire dragon-flies with ruby eyes passed and passed again above him; the dainty white-fronted dippers played in and out all round him, and an occasional sullen echoing splash told where some monster steel-blue salmon, wide-gilled, hook-jawed, firm-sided, fresh run from the sea, was attempting the passage of the falls. From time to time a flock of grouse burst with a whirr of wings overhead to drop out of sight over the opposite wall of honey-colored rock. Once it was no grouse, but a raking form that went by, flying with that slashing winnow that is the mark of the peregrine falcon all the world over; once too a single snipe came and—for reasons alone known to itself—hovered exactly

THE SAINT

above the fall
calling, calling,
and once with a
mighty rush of wings
and a huge flurry and
commotion a great cock-
capercaillie went sailing
majestically by.

A RAKING FORM WENT BY,
FLYING WITH THAT SLASHING
WINNOW THAT IS THE MARK
OF THE PEREGRINE FALCON ALL
THE WORLD OVER.

From the fall of dark-
ness for upwards of an
hour the bats as
they wheeled and
swerved caught
sight of the
steady glare
of two eyes at
the edge of
the cleft.
That was all
— just the
eyes unmov-



PEOPLE OF THE WILD

ing, inscrutable, and indescribably malignant. That was the Saint taking his bearings. He was no fool. He knew that his was no life to expose recklessly and that such as he are not allowed to make even one mistake. Hence this motionless sitting just within the cleft, this frigid watching, this keen listening, this testing and analysing of every scent riding on the air currents. Had a man moved, had a man drawn a loud breath even the Saint would have known it.

Then a cloud slid across the moon, and as its shadow passed across the cleft and on, something, it seemed, just the least suspicion of a deeper shadow, passed with it—or was it imagination? Any way, when the cloud shadow had gone—and that was in almost the same time as a man would take to hold a deep breath—there was no longer the steady glow of those burning coals within the cleft. There was nothing at all, the place was empty, and the Saint was shambling downhill through dense cover a hundred yards away. I do not pretend to know how he got there; one moment in his

THE SAINT

den, the next drifting, drifting, a shadow among a dozen shadows, in and out over the mottled floor of moss, between the crawling stems of age-old heather—down-hill to the still and stately gloom of the woods.

Once within the cathedral silence of the columned aisles the beast paused. There was a fine smell of pines in the air and pine needles crunched underfoot. Far above him the wind was singing a romping song to itself among the tops of the trees. It sounded like the far-away dirge of surf trampling on a sandy shore. There was no other sound.

Suddenly dim stars floated in the spaces between the grained boles; twin lights swung from trunk to trunk. There was a whisper as of fairy feet flitting. One could, in that hour and setting, have believed anything, believed even that he had surprised the fairies of the place at their gambols. But they were no fairies. The moonlight said so. Twenty yards away it was pleased to weave a patch of silver tracery shining

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

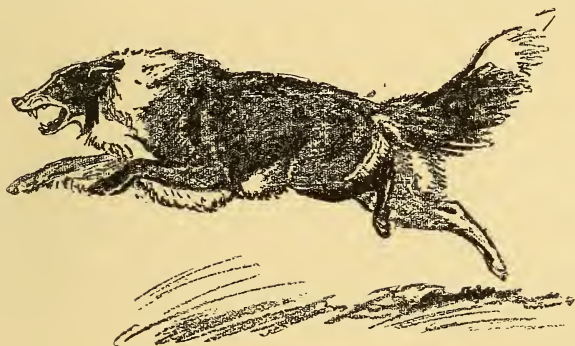
through the branched roof, and a brown form trotted—trotted I say, drifted light as a wisp of smoke across it.

Instantly without one second's pause, the Saint had projected himself, swift as a bolt, across the intervening space, but he was met by a tearing blow on the face, and the beast that he had sprung at was *not* there. It was—it had been—a roebuck. None but the roe could have executed that stealthy flitting and that perfect rebuff and evasion. Of all the deer none could have acted with such agility and—this was the miracle—such coolness.

Then it was that our wolverene revealed his true colors, and one saw that men had not christened him the Saint for nothing. With blood streaming down his diabolical face, he raged and tore like a thing possessed of a devil. He growled, he gibbered, he snarled, he rolled, he tore up the earth with his long white claws, he ran round in circles, he bit up dead branches, and finally he set off at a canter upon a tour of destruction that was to live in the memory of the keepers of Glenskye.

THE SAINT

It is on record that on that short night he discovered, "threw," wrenched up, and hid no less than sixteen traps which had been set for vermin; killed in sheer wanton lust of slaughter not less than three rabbits, six grouse, and in the lower woods, four low-roosting pheasants, and finally ended by



A COLLIE STARTED IN TO ROUT THE PILLAGER, BUT
HE WAS HIMSELF ROUTED

pursuing a hare into a sheep-fold and then terrifying those woolly ones to such an extent that they broke away and fled not less than four miles across the moors. He must have attacked the sheep too, for more than one bore ugly wounds on the flank, such wounds as his steely jaws alone could in-

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

flict—though it was put down to the account of poachers' dogs, as the traps which vanished were put down to the door of poachers. A shepherd's dog, a collie, discovered him at this gentle pastime at two in the morning, and started in to rout the pillager, but he was himself routed and returned to his master at 2:08 a. m. a ghastly and wrecked horror.

The day that followed found the Saint hidden in his nearly impregnable lair. He slept the sleep of the wild folk, which is at the same time the deepest and lightest of sleep. Rain storms chased one another across the face of the moor, black clouds piled up and toppled and tore, and men prowled all whither. They were keepers—four men with worried-looking faces, for which fact there was no wonder. Smythe was in a state bordering upon insanity. His moors were being ruined, his woods were being spoilt, and worst of all his high moor, his daisy, his shoot of shoots was, so far as the grouse were concerned, going to the dogs.

THE SAINT

Nor was that all; the absence of traps was giving the vermin a chance, there were already signs of an increase of the banned ones. Finally, as if this were not enough, that old ruffian Macgregor would button-hole him when and wherever it happened to be most inconvenient—in front of Blatant Hardway for choice—and complain of the fact that the vermin from Glenskye were spreading all over his moors.

“Can ye no trap, mon? Can ye no trap? It’s awfu’. Yon high moor o’ yours is just crawlin’ varmin,” cried old Mac, and Smythe choked.

Hardway cursed Smythe, and Smythe cursed the keepers, and the keepers having nobody to curse, patrolled them with loaded guns, by night as well as day, it being thought that poachers stole the traps and their dogs did the rest of the damage. It was even suspected that old Mac had these poachers in pay, for it was an open secret among the men that Smythe had, by laying trails of dainty foods and oils, and by paying shepherds to let their dogs run free on

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Glenask and keep them "at heel" on Glen-skye, ruined the shooting on the former to the glory of the latter in the previous season.

The burning orbs of the Saint saw these men pass and repass, their forms silhouetted against the sky-line when the moon got up over the hills that night, and he trebled his caution accordingly. It was fully an hour and a half after dark when he sallied upon his raid that night. As before, he was out and away long before the keenest watcher could have realised it. He trailed the patrols, watched them from the heart of the thickets, drew circles round them and examined them from every point of view.

Finally, he lured one of their dogs on his trail till, a quarter of a mile away from any help, he turned and rent the unfortunate one and sent it howling to its master, a dog carved scientifically past all recognition. Moreover, as if that did not satisfy, he unearthed the keepers' suppers hidden in a hollow tree, scattered them broadcast, and hid what he could not scatter—aye, even to

THE SAINT

the flask of "th' wee drappie" hid he the things. Then he retired to the serried larch-woods and dined serenely off blackcock, picking, mind you, only the daintiest portion of each bird, as the disunited corpses next day attested.

Any stranger who had visited Glenskye in the days that followed that night would have declared the land to be in a state of war. There was no peace in the place at all, though there was silence; that silence which discovers waiting men armed with loaded guns behind thickets, that silence which comes from the knowledge of being continually under observation of at least one pair of binoculars had Glenskye. And by night there were ceaseless patrols also. In those days it was certain death for any dog not holding an official position to be found upon the shooting estate of friend Hardway, and little better for a strange man. Nevertheless, the position became in no wise less strained at all. In fact, it was evident from the clouded brow of Hardway and the fierce desperation written upon the face of

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Smythe that something very terrible would happen soon. It must. There was no hope for it.

Meanwhile nobody—and there were, with local police, not more than thirty watchers armed variously, to say nothing of dogs of terrible and murderous aspect—did anything; nobody saw anything; nobody heard anything. It was as if the land were under a spell, as if the spirits of all the poachers that had ever in days past visited Glenskye had chosen that time to rise from their graves and visit it again. Traps continued to saunter apparently into spookland; coveys of grouse which to-day were a wondrous fine sight in the face of the sun, were to-morrow a scattered and panic-stricken remnant fleeing blindly from the death in the night that they could not see; pheasants which roosted carelessly low one night roosted in the other world the next, and even the great, pompous capercailzie cocks, the pride and glory of Glenskye, appeared to be slowly dissolving like vapor into the deadly nights.

THE SAINT

Nor was that all; a keeper left his gun in a locked hut on the high moor at sundown and by sunrise it had gone, walked into the darkness and no more returned, and half-a-dozen other things, game-bags, sticks, traps, and little things of that sort, had gone with it. Here, however, there was something to go upon. A Thing had broken in at the back of the hut and this, unless it had been a dog or a badger, must certainly have been a boy. No man could have crawled through that hole. Then it is on record that Smythe went temporarily but completely mad, and old Mac ceased suddenly from sauntering up and down the boundary, mocking the while in a loud voice, because Smythe had run after him with a loaded gun and an under-keeper hanging desperately round his waist.

From this you will perceive that not at this time, and possibly at no time, was the presence of the Saint suspected, or even hinted at. Probably not a man there knew that such a beast existed in any part of the world, let alone here in the grouse's holy of

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

holies. It was always the same theme, the same quest, poachers must do the stealing and their dogs the killing, and thus, partly because of his unparalleled caution, partly because of his marked nocturnal habits, his immense fighting powers, and above all his uncanny—I had almost said human—knowledge and cunning, the Saint might for all I know have continued filibustering at Glenskye to this day had he been content. Unfortunately, however, as happened to Alexander, he sighed for other worlds to conquer. He had done every conceivable sort of harm that he could do to Glenskye, had “knocked the stuffing out of the place” in fact, and was now prompted—possibly by the devil his master—to extend his sphere of influence.

Then calamity descended upon him.

It was on the seventeenth night after his escape, a night of tearing wind, racing clouds, bursts and spatters of rain, and velvet blackness, that the Saint evacuated the cleft and removed, at his indescribable slouch, away, away, over the hills. Some-

THE SAINT

thing of that restless nomad spirit which afflicts all the weasel tribe must have come upon him in that hour, I think. For a moment he paused on the edge of the heather and hesitated. He shook himself with a swirl of flying wet and sniffed the hammering gale. Whither? He had all the compass to choose from. But fate had turned her face from him at last. He shambled off westward, and westward lay Glenask and, what was the main point, old Macgregor—but how was he to know that?

Once, on his way, he heard men whispering and knew by the taint in the air that they were not ten yards off; these were keepers lying in wait for him, had they known it, but they never knew. Once, too, he “froze” at the vibration of footsteps—man’s assuredly, for they were too clumsy for any beast’s—and as he “froze” Smythe’s dog, following at his master’s heels, growled suddenly and checked. Smythe stopped, rooted. The Saint was still as a tree.

Then Smythe said something low and quick, and the dog sprang with a roar.

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Followed a whirl in the inky void, a quick and horrible growling, a rush of smothered snarlings, a yell from the dog, and silence. The dog came back with a three-inch gash on his shoulder, and the Saint went away in a hurry because both barrels of Smythe's gun had sent quite a number of shot singing and whining at his heels. But Smythe never saw him. He only heard the rustle of his passage.

When the Saint struck Glenask things happened. He was hungry, he was angry, and here was a moor full of game, a close-trapped place where Hardway's harried ones had found shelter. No need was there for his marvelous hunting knowledge, a single bound scooped up one grouse, and a second, lightning quick as the covey rose, slashed down a second.

Later, his hunger appeased, he turned to the cooling of his anger. From far away, on the gale, came the sound of a thing that was in trouble, so that it could not refrain from yelling. Him the Saint stalked, and the stalk ended in a trapped stoat which swiftly,

THE SAINT

with the wolverene's assistance, became a dead stoat. The rest was easy; needed only to trail Macgregor, who had set that trap, and every trap on that part of the moor—ten in all—was successfully dealt with after his own gentle and peculiar fashion. After that he moved down to Mac's cottage itself, where he spent the rest of that night, mocking at the chained dogs, sampling the blood of Mac's fowls, and generally stirring things up.

Next dawning Mac's flaming beard, thrust in at the fowl-shed door, fairly bristled at the sight of the butcher's-shop that was within.

"Ach," said Mac. "I'm thinking he's come."

Then Mac fetched his rifle, cast loose four beagles, flung them once round the fowl-house, and in five minutes was toiling, panting, up the glen in the wake of as fine a burst of hound music as ever wakened the echoes of a misty morning.

The Saint heard the din from the bowels of a hollow tree in a pine wood and bared

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glistening fangs superciliously. It was a new discord to him. It might mean anything, or nothing. Anyway, he was in good hiding—he would sleep. But the riot increased until, with a crash, it broke round his tree—broke and raged and surged again. Then it ceased.

The wolverene was fully awake now. He was, as nearly as could be, alarmed, and for good reason. Mac was chopping down the tree. Ignominiously he turned him out of the crashing down trunk, turned him out into blinding sun, to fight for his life. With his back against another tree, in a flash, he faced the hounds. He had to. There was nothing else for it. Followed a bar-like gleam as the sun glinted along a rifle barrel, a tiny stab of flame, a sharp, short report, and the Saint stiffened all over, drew himself up to his full height, leaped straight at the pack, and fell in mid-leap—dead.

Silently Mac buried him and silently he went home. He said nothing about the matter to anyone and has continued to say nothing ever since. You ask him to-day

THE SAINT

what is a wolverene? He will simply answer:

“Now, ye’ll understand, I’m in noo sense paid to study Natural Heestory.”

And that is all.

FLIGHTS ABROAD

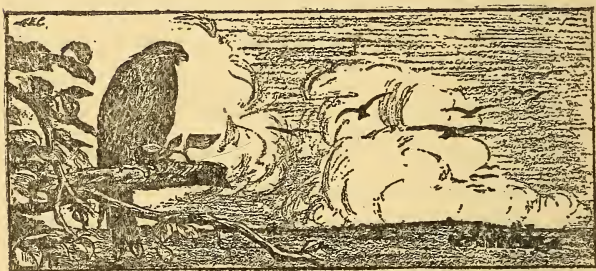
FLIGHTS ABROAD

HE had come down from the clouds and landed upon a black grouse chick as if by accident. In those days—it was the year 1809—black grouse were more plentiful than they are now, which may or may not explain many things that follow. The chick let forth one treble squawk and then sputtered out of life like a candle extinguished by a wet hand. Thereafter the apparition removed itself to the top branch of a tree, amid varied exclamations and much battering from the late chick's ma, a gray hen whose bearings were somewhat heated, as it were.

There may be finer-looking birds, and there are fiercer pirates of the air, but as a picture of rapine this specimen, carved—from hooked bill and taloned claw to great swallow-tail and clean-cut, raking wings—

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as if in old oak, even to the black graining, surmounting a naked, lightning-blasted tree against the angry burning circle of the dying sun, this, I say, was a sight to return in dreams for a lifetime. Before science he was a black or migratory kite and had no



BEFORE SCIENCE HE WAS A BLACK OR MIGRATORY
KITE AND HAD NO BUSINESS WHERE HE
WAS AT ALL

business where he was at all—for which he did not thank a southeast gale. Before the world, at this moment, he was a masterpiece of nature's carving.

Something flashed in the gorse bushes. Somebody moved a head; and, lone and masterless, a bullet cut sharp off the bough on which the kite sat. Then came a report

FLIGHTS ABROAD

and a smother of smoke, and, thanks to the latter, the kite righted himself as he fell and sought the horizon not slowly. It was his first introduction to a musket, his baptism of fire, and like all birds of prey, who are highly strung to a degree and hate noise almost as much as a cat does, he was upset for an hour after and shied at everything he saw.

As the South Downs slid past in quick time beneath him a buzzard got up out of a hawthorn and rose toward him in gigantic circles, mewing in what it meant to be an angry tone, but which only succeeded in being plaintive and absurd for such an ample-winged free-booter. The buzzard had a nest in the hawthorn and saw, therefore, a menace to her peace in everything that flew, but the kite knew nothing of that and cared less. He had seen a pigeon go into a tree where the Downs died into the Weald, and he was going to have that pigeon, buzzard or no buzzard.

He let himself down in hundred-foot stages, quite indifferent to the gale, and the

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buzzard followed. Then he turned and fell upon the buzzard with a scream borrowed from some fury or other, and that bird collapsed and fled, still mewling into the teeth of the gale, for buzzards have the appearance of an eagle and the heart of a rabbit.

For a moment the kite hove to, swinging in the wind as only a kite can, bewildered at the easy victory, then he surrendered himself to the gale and, with still wings, was hurled away down-wind in the wake of the pigeon.

Just as it seemed that he was doomed to end his days with a broken neck among the branches of an oak, he gave a twist, rudder fashion, to his immense forked tail, swung, hung, and drifted slowly up a branch on the leeward side of the tree. There may be other birds capable of harnessing the wind to their needs with a minimum amount of effort and a maximum amount of skill, not forgetting for one second to be graceful, but I do not know them.

The pigeon was in a tree farther up the hedgerow, dreaming of peas. In front of

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him other pigeons were doing their utmost to complete the ruin that the weeds had begun in a pea field, and half a dozen jays were playing the fool closer in and near the edge of a wood to the right.

The kite beheld these jays with no joy at all; it was nothing to him if they were a wonderfully pretty picture of life and color—which they certainly were. They happened to be between him and his prey, and he knew the pigeons would break for cover directly the jays gave the alarm.

He sat on, therefore, rigid, erect, and scowling the indescribable, aloof, haughty scowl of all rapacious birds. A thick-knee plover dropped off the Downs and settled twenty yards away. A raven croaked a thick, evil croak somewhere up the slope, and a badger rooted for acorns among last year's leaves under the very oak on which he sat.

Then—oh horrors!—what was that? Came a rush of wings—they might have been waves for the noise they made—and five great bodies sailed by on either side of the tree. They landed on the field with a

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confusion which seemed to have blown the pigeons up like flickering scraps of paper, while the jays became scarce in exactly seven and a quarter seconds.

If they had been eagles the confusion could not have been more complimentary. They were only bustards, however, great bustards, the same that the country folk of the Downs called wild turkeys, which they most decidedly were not.

The kite opened his eyes wide when he beheld the great, black-moustached, white-breasted, brown cock birds, and something began to work in the place where he kept his memory at the back of his brain. Then one of the giants—they *were* giants, being not less than three and a half feet tall, said "Prunt!" loudly and very deep down in his throat, and the kite jumped as if a wasp had stung him. The last time he had heard that call-note was when his mate was robbing a bustard's nest in Africa, and the lord and master of that nest had arrived and in turn robbed his mate—of her life.

The pigeons did not return, for which the

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kite blamed the bustards, and the huge birds annexed the field unto themselves, driving off all visitors as if they paid rent and tithe. And all the time the kite fairly danced with rage on his branch. He was ravenous, for one thing, and for another he hated those birds with the deadly hatred that grows up in a lonely heart against the cause of the loneliness; for a third, the day was dying and with it his chance of making a kill.

Perhaps it was the fact that one of the cock bustards had white wings instead of a white breast, as with all the rest, and white is a good mark in the dusk and shows up well for those who prowl on the lookout for something to kill. Came a roar like thunder which danced all over the Downs and came back again. The bustards erupted into the air in a chaotic, flapping cloud and beat into the eye of the setting sun, not slowly, and with a scandalous amount of noise.

Some one had fired a gun at them from behind that hedge, that was clear. It was also clear that the shot was a wasted one.

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But the keen-eyed kite saw more than the man. The white-winged bustard had passed him close and the bird of prey knew that his meal was safe, after all. That bustard carried three leaden slugs "where he lived," as the saying is.

Then the kite followed as a jackal follows; saw the wounded one swerve from the swift-moving flock; marked where he dropped to earth, and ran for cover. Then, in the fullness of time, the kite dropped and finished the work that the lead had begun and slept on a tree above his banquet after.

There is wind and wind. That which emanates from the southwest, to which point of the compass it had shifted from the southeast, and hits the South Downs full on the cheek can, upon occasion, create a fair-sized bluster. Never had that kite known such a wind, and he was by way of being a wind expert, too.

The tree whereon he lodged was not a small tree, a Scotch fir, and the same are a well-anchored type. The wind troubled it badly and turned it into a buck-jumping

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death trap. It kicked, it shivered, it pranced, it doubled, it threshed, it knelt, it reared, it bowed—this was when the father of all the gusts took it in the top branches—it tickled its toes with its fingers, it caressed all its arms with all its other arms—here the kite retired to the main trunk in a hurry—it combed its hair feverishly—and slew two roosting missel-thrushes in the process—it broke its oldest arm, but not clean off, and the useless limb, hanging loose, threshed about masterless to the detriment of half the other limbs and the buzzards, which it brained scientifically. Finally the tree started a crazy stand-up fight with its nearest neighbor, a pine on the right, much to the horror and damage of the numerous winged lodgers on both combatants.

When he had got used to seeing his own tail bent, umbrella fashion, over his head, had become accustomed to viewing the world at all known and unknown angles, often upside down, and had mastered the art of sleeping between gusts, a thing without a name hit the kite on the back and clung there

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screaming. It had come from nowhere special and apparently was bound for a like destination, and it must have been mad, because it affected to believe that the kite's back was as good a perch as any other.

Thanks to his patent automatic lock grasp, the kite did not tumble inconsequently and promptly to his doom. He hung on—while the tree seemed on the point of retiring into the northeast—and shivered with fright amid the roar and confusion. Since, however, he had long ago run out of all known species of terror and was incapable of summoning up any further fear that would do justice to the position, he began to act.

Well he knew that to let go his perch meant in all probability letting go of his life also, so there was nothing for it but the beak. He turned upon himself and investigated the unknown thing with his clawlike bill and struck feathers. Then they fought.

It was in no manner an ordinary kind of fight, you will understand, for both combatants were mad with fear of anything

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and everything to begin with. Also they had to stop about every thirty seconds to meet the gusts and hang on for dear life. Moreover, they were more than likely to be brained by the flying branches at any moment.

In the end the enemy lost his hold and vanished like a blown sheet of white paper into the howling blackness. I think he was a barn-owl. At least, his eyes shone and his color was suggestive of such.

In the pale gray of an exhausted dawn the wind went down with the tide, backing to the north, and five black specks slid up in slow time out of the east. They were the mourners, come to bury that Cæsar of the wilds, the bustard. Rather, perhaps, they were the grave-diggers, and the grave was themselves and the spades were their own beaks.

The kite had no love for these black ones, carrion crows by the look of them, and he beheld them without enthusiasm. He had just one minute five seconds to breakfast on bustard, and he did not fall asleep. As an

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exhibition of quick gorge it was amazing. That corpse changed considerably in appearance in that interval.

“Kra-a! Kra-a! Kra-a!”

Thanks. Time up. That was the bull-necked, black-visaged, and blacker-hearted crows inviting him to “get,” and since they had all the guns, he quitted reluctantly and heavily, calling down curses of awful import on the foe as he went.

He swung in circles over the ample, blunt-nosed Downs, watching the day folk wake up and salute the golden torrents of sunshine. There are no words to describe the wonder of this bird’s flight, the serene, still-winged, calm, and wondrous soaring, the flawless curves, the easy sweeps, every poise brimming with infinite grace, all accomplished, all made possible, by that forked tail and the scientific use of the same.

A hare limped over the rolling heights and passed. A thickknee plover ran, half crouching, across the stony waste of a bare patch. A couple of herring-gulls drew silver streaks against the blue-gray wonder of

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the turf below, and a shepherd stood, a gaunt, cloaked figure, leaning on his crook, above the white cliffs frowning seaward.

Then a buzzard came flapping with noiseless flight up over the shoulder of a brow and dropped sliding into a hollow, where the turtle-dove had dived for a hawthorn. Both birds vanished, and the skylarks seemed to be the only living things left in all that simple sweep of sky and hill. Then out of the tangle below shot the turtle-dove, and dropped like a falling projectile into the dim, black, timbered mystery of the Sussex Weald. Followed a yell and a great flapping from the hawthorns, but the buzzard did not appear.

When the kite fell to investigate and, settling on a bough, peered into the heaped confusion of age-old hawthorn and gorse beneath which the earthworks thrown up by the rabbits and badgers shone white, he could see nothing. Some one in that labyrinth was in trouble so that they could not help saying so, flapping huge wings and screeching like half a dozen fiends. Closer investi-

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gation, however, unearthed the buzzard at loggerheads with a trap which had been baited with a turtle-dove's egg.

The kite preened his feathers and sat down as one who is used to waiting. In one hour or ten—what did it matter?—that buzzard would beat his strength out and be exhausted. Then a hungry kite might, with dextrous claws and beak, help that trap and finish the work so well begun by the contrivance.

It was the ship's bell that awoke him. I think he dozed in the stagnant sunshine. There was, so far as he remembered, no wind in this cuplike hollow, nor above it, for the matter of that. Only, the air was full of skylark's song as the air of a church is filled with the sound of an organ and the ceaseless hum of the countless insects rose all about.

There seemed no interval between this and waking to a dead, dumb, chill, gray silence, shattered only at intervals by the alarmed and hurried, fretful beating of a ship's bell, an annoying sound—quite close

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it seemed and made by nothing at all so far as eyes could see. It was characteristic of the bird—of all the wild folk—that he was awake in a wink; awake not only, but alert and alive, possessed at once and fully master of all his faculties; and he stared at—nothing!

Swiftly and without warning, as without sound, the shrouded horror of the sea-fog had reared its coils up from the Channel like a hooded cobra and blotted out the day in a treble-welted, blanketing, swirling, dripping, menacing mystery.

The kite shook out his feathers and shivered. He was not used to this sort of thing. He felt inclosed, as it were, compassed about. He found, to his horror, that he could not see ten yards, and if a bird cannot see far he is done. He is in such circumstances as helpless as a fowl in deep snow, and that is very helpless indeed.

The buzzard was quiet now and might, if the kite could only summon up courage, be slain with care. About this time, however, he became aware of a movement

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among the gorse. There was no wind, not a particle, and the fog cloaked anything and everything.

Goodness knows what danger might be behind that movement. Next moment a form reared up out of space barely two yards away, and the kite's eyes almost jumped out of his head. It was a man, just an ordinary man, the shepherd who had set that trap, but the fog turned him into a giant of awful import.

Because the kite was sitting quite still the man had not seen him. He carried a gun, at least he called it such, but whom it might kill save its owner was questionable. A shepherd of to-day would not have used such a weapon for much money. The only thing more doubtful about this weapon than whether it might or might not go off when it was wanted was whether it would kill the quarry or its owner.

The man did not see the going of that kite. He heard it, however, a whistling of scimitar wings, and he fired at random—an awful roar—and hit nothing.

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Those who are not acquainted with the winged ones have little idea how they can play with distance. That kite had not cleaved through fifty yards of smothering fog before he was lost utterly and irrevocably, but he went straight ahead and with the wind, and was well over Brittany before he stopped. Here he "held up" a partridge out on an afternoon stroll and started to open up its breast without further ado. Then more fog, and more blind flying, frightened out of all its wits, and, of course, with the wind, till night.

Somewhere in the middle of the night, when he had attained a truly terrifying height, he picked up his bearings. Below, as it were on a map, a silver sheet of glass stretched into the south. There was no wind, or very little, but what there was had no chill, nor was it damp, and he knew he had struck the Mediterranean.

Dawn—all blazoned in saffron and gold and purple—discovered a very tired kite asleep and snoring in a niche high up in

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some forgotten tomb of one of Egypt's departed great. He opened one eye and glared out over sand rolling like a sea, and showing back gold for gold, sand parched and pitiless, sand scarcely yet cool from the heat of yesterday. All around him were temples crumbling to decay, and the kite screamed in pure, insolent joy. He had found his native Africa at last.

No care was there like the care with which he preened his feathers that morning; no stretching so glorious as the stretching of each stiff, rustling, wonderful pinion and brutally clawed leg to the heat of that sun—his sun—that his being rejoiced in and knew. The dryness of it all—this perch dusted with the dust of centuries, the air, the river bed gleaming white and waterless a hundred yards away, the glaring sand, the palms so still and tall and calm, and above all the little dust devils, the baby whirlwinds that came from nowhere and went nowhere, that danced across the plain in twisting sand-clouds and died, falling cloak-wise—flop!

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HE KNEW THAT A CARAVAN MEANT A CITY SOONER
OR LATER, AND IT MAY MEAN FOOD

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Then he rose calm and sublime, circling in the molten gold that was fading to blue. He marked where a pair of cream-colored coursers ran as swiftly as hares over the swelling waste, making things unpleasant for the countless grasshoppers. He, or his shadow rather, surprised a bunch of pin-tailed grouse at business with whatever these strange birds find to feed upon, and they promptly froze and became of the sand sandy. He upset—literally—a quail sunning himself on a stone, and would have had him if a caracal—and the same is a beast like a spare, smooth-coated, tawny lynx—had not sprung up out of the very ground—at least, so it seemed—and annexed the quarry for himself.

Later he sighted a caravan, a string of stately, sour-tempered camels, more or less obeying men as stately—and certainly as picturesquely dirty—as themselves. He knew that a caravan meant a city sooner or later, and it may mean food, and he drew circles, compasslike, above it, screaming the while in pure delight of life.

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The city that he and the caravan ran up against an hour later was—from a distance—a white splendor floating on an ocean of sand. The city, as he investigated it at close quarters, was a sink—no less. It was, however, his personal idea of a perfect city—that is to say, a place where one might find enough refuse to feed upon.

Suddenly he slanted downward. A man had been killing sheep somewhere and, coming to the city wall, cast out some bones. They were good bones, with meat on them enough for any kite. This he found when he settled, and since they were too heavy to carry conveniently, he tackled them where they lay.

“G-r-r-r-r!”

The sound seemed to come up out of the ground, and with it, over a huge block of stone, rose a dog. The kite had seen some specimens of the pariah, the ownerless, more than half-wild dog of all African cities, but this lean, limping, leering insult to the regal sunlight was as sad an accident as he had ever clapped eyes upon.

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Knowing the breed, he did not at once retreat, but gave back a scream that threatened many things, which, by the way, he was incapable of doing. The dog came on. Except for its appearance, it might have been a cat by its walk. It slid forward on its belly, in an atmosphere of growls and snapping yellow fangs.



HE DARE NOT TAKE HIS EYES OFF THE CROUCHING,
ADVANCING RED SHAPE IN FRONT OF HIM

The kite never saw the vultures that came and removed the other bones, because he dare not take his eyes off the crouching, advancing red shape in front of him. He heard them, however; a hissing of great bodies and greater wings, another hissing, not of wings, but throats, and a passing "frou frou" of stiff pinions as they removed.

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An abortive attempt on his part to fly away with the bone proved disastrous. He got four feet above the ground and dropped it, and the mangy apology for a dog dived in and secured the booty.

For this he received as a reward half a dozen daggers embodied in a whirlwind on his back and removed about four yards in two seconds, ki-yi-ing at the top of his voice. It was sudden and unexpected, that attack, and it might have been an eagle. One never knows, if one is an animal in these sweltering lands, what manner of winged horror may descend. But it was no eagle, only the kite who was sliding in a sort of mixed-up run, fly, and hop over the next rise.

That dog started warlike operations for the recovery of that feed, and let himself go for the rise full speed ahead. Then something did something in his path, and he twisted around three times before he fled in an opposite direction. He had only run into a horned viper, quite a small matter, since he was a dog of no account, but—well, the vultures attended his funeral later.

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Not long after that our kite swung on still wings out to the miserable huts that hid beneath the palms where the city died into the sand. He was lost in thought, apparently, till a flock of pigeons got up off a roof and twinkled down into a field, where some man more courageous than his fellows had tried to coax a crop out of the sandy earth.

There is no ease at all in singling a pigeon, which knows exactly what you are up to, out of a flock, cutting him off from all things in the shape of cover, and hunting him against his will into the open. Yet this the kite did, hugging the mazelike dodging of his quarry, the turns borrowed from a lightning flash, the drops and dives that were heralded by no warning, the twists that deceived the quickest eye, the falls that threatened to end in a broken neck and did end only in up-flung, nerve-quivering ascents.

There was something startling and unexpected in the remorseless, fiery energy this bird of prey threw into the chase; something almost uncanny in the fury and the speed of it, which seemed out of place with that sub-

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lime, placid sailing that he had made so peculiarly his own.

That pigeon was not made of steel. After all, he was only a pigeon, and even pigeons, fine players as they are, have their limits. His limit arrived quite suddenly, and he threw up the sponge with a hopeless fluttering, like a stricken butterfly, to the parched, hard, glistening sand. The kite who knew no mercy—as he never expected to receive any—was unthinkingly merciful. A blow of that black, razor-edged beak and the pigeon was dead. The end was much more merciful than the chase.

This hunting had a purpose behind it. The journey was not yet accomplished. The kite had farther to go, and he, like Napoleon's army, flew on his belly, after all's said and done.

In another hour he beat out over the desert, not gracefully now or on still wings, but purposefully and on stately beating pinions. He flew with the air of one who had come far and was aware of many more miles to follow.

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There is no space to tell of that journey; of how he dodged the eagle and gained the cover of a mimosa tree two inches in front of a saker falcon! How he descended upon a dying spur-winged goose and how the goose made one last struggle and almost slew him in the process and a crocodile ended the matter by removing the goose! How he came upon a caravan of men dying of thirst and saw ivory dropped by the wayside as if it were refuse and one man said—but this he did not understand—that the ivory had taken fifty lives in the getting! And how in the night, after the men were gone, hyenas came to gnaw at the ivory and could make no impression upon it! How Kilimanjaro, the mountain of mountains, snow-peaked, dominant, and superb even at thirty miles' distance, loomed out of the night and he went to sleep in a candelabra tree and snored lustily till dawn!

Even if it were not impossible, it would be profanation to attempt to describe the supreme glory of the sunrise next morning as the kite beheld it from his perch by the

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mighty candelabra tree, with the weaver birds darting in and out of their great and wonderful hanging nests all around him. The roaring, rampant day swept up in full blast.

Hosts of Egyptian and spur-winged geese rose along the line of marshes before him. Spur-winged lapwings drew mazes in the air, and dainty black and white avocets crossed athwart the reed forest in streaking lines. Eagles with white heads and tails sailed above the glassy water, which was shattered every few moments into diamond splinters by hosts of rising fish, and pink and red flamingoes stood out in solid ranks against the chocolate brown of the mud-banks.

To the right dust clouds rose as though from marching armies—armies indeed, but animals. He marked the bull-necked gnus in herds, and the gaudy zebras, and the hartebeests with long hammer heads; the stately lyre-horned Grant's gazelles, the swinging necks of the giraffes like masts of ships rising above the sea of dust, and the

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quick moving black and white blotches of ostriches all returning to the veldt for the day.

A great blackish patch grew slowly into the reeds. Followed a roar, mighty as the roar of a lion but more ponderous, the challenge of a bull-hippopotamus. Another great blotch grew out of the reeds and moved slowly across the veldt. A spear flash followed. The blotch swerved, kicked up dust, and moved quickly; even at the distance he could hear the snorting of a rhinoceros. Later, when the hunters had given up the folly of following it among the reed forests, he helped the vultures and marabout storks to bury it.

Later also, when the crowd around the dead rhinoceros became too thick and began to lose its temper, and the marabouts slung their great pickax beaks about too recklessly to be safe, he removed him to the veldt. He dropped upon a ground squirrel—the earth was rotten with their burrows in some places—and missed his prey by half a hair's breadth. He found a dwarf-antelope fawn

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among some wait-a-bit thorn, but its mother appeared and he remembered an appointment elsewhere.

Then a griffon vulture passed in hot haste, intimating that a leopard had killed a baboon a mile away, but when he got there the leopard was guarding his kill, and though he loafed about for an hour in the company of half a dozen disconsolate vultures, he got nothing. A musket report brought him back to an acacia clump where he found an enraged lion looking for three men who were up a tree, but the lion seemed far too lively to die yet awhile and he left him still looking for those men.

Later he came upon a bustard—even one of his old foes—who seemed to have something wrong with his flying machinery. The bustard, however, demonstrated that his beak was in working order, and our kite, knowing something of the obliterating power of an angry bustard's beak, left the whole contrivance to be interviewed by a jackal.

Loafing—always in circles, always on still wings—over the burnt and staring veldt, he

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became aware of birds beneath him. He did not see them. Only he heard them, and he wondered where in the name of flight,



THE FIRST SAND GROUSE WAS DOWN AGAIN, THE
KITE ON TOP OF IT

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feathers, and talons they might be. In the wild there is a saying expressive of quick sight—"Eyes of a kite," they say. Here, however, the eyes of a kite saw nothing but sun-blistered earth, sand, and boulders.

He sank as if he were a feather floating down. Settled he upon the ground and sidled forward. Then he almost fell over something, which got up in his face with a squawk, and all the ground about seemed to vomit birds. Pin-tail sand grouse, by thunder! They had been squatting there close all the time, harmonizing most beautifully with all things about them.

A rush of wings, a burst of feathers, a scuffle, and the first sand grouse was down again, the kite on top of it.

Another rush of wings, mightier than the first. Another scuffle. Another burst of feathers, and the kite was down. A tremendous and awful apparition of a bird, known but vaguely to men as a war-like crested eagle, was on top of him. And there the story, and the life of our black kite ended quite abruptly thus——!!!!

LONE LUCK

LONE LUCK

SLOUCH, slouch, slouch, slouch. You could tell him for a "long dog" half a mile away by his walk alone. But what the wondrous happenings was he doing here?

His master kept a "barrer" down Commercial Road way (and that is "East") and he kept his master. He was a lurcher, one part bull-dog, three parts greyhound, and poaching was his trade. Still, what was he doing here?

It all came about by his master "dotting" a fellow "barrer" owner "one on the snitch," and the "dottee" falling backwards with his head against the curb. Result—broken head on the one hand and "fourteen days hard" on the other.

Now, his master's "Missus" disapproved of poaching, not on a point of modesty, but

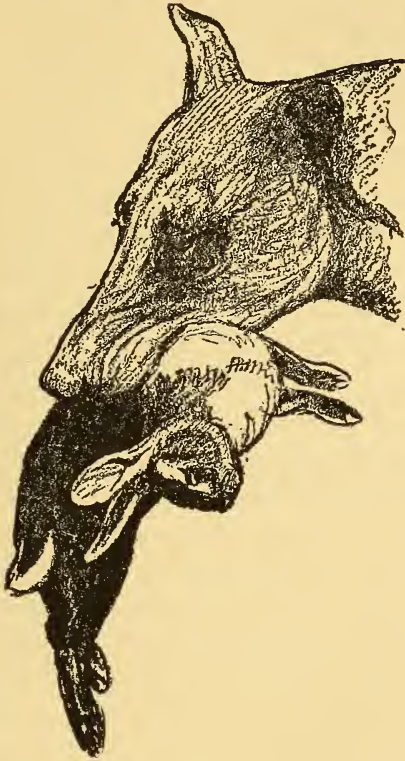
PEOPLE OF THE WILD

morals. Even a coster may object to her husband being out all night. The "long dog" was party to these nocturnal philanderings. Right!—the long dog should go. And the long dog went—while his master languished philosophically through his "fourteen days." To "a cousin in the country" went the long dog—always slouching—and the fact that the country was wild, mountainous, and desolate had no concern for the poacher's wife. Country held for her only one meaning; a place outside London, as distinct from that other place outside London, the sea to wit.

And the "long dog" said no word, which, as you may have observed, is particularly and especially the "long dog's" strong point all England over. Possibly this is why they are unbeloved of women.

Unhappily the "long dog" disapproved of the "cousin in the country"—disapproved of him all round. The hymn meetings on Sunday evenings, the sleeping when all was quiet and dark, the steady work, the lack of appreciation when the "long dog"

LONE LUCK



WHAT HE KNEW AS A "DRUMMER"

landed what he called a "red 'un," and the
cousin "t' Laird's cock bird;" the beating

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which followed upon the clever scooping in of what he knew as a "drummer" and the cousin as a rabbit, and above all the starched, soaped, clean, clipped, and washen honesty were distasteful to the "long dog" beyond words. But, being a "long dog," he said no word. He removed—into the landscape.

From that time the "long dog" ceased to be an appendage. He wrapped himself about with mystery. From that time, also, his doings ceased to be in the knowledge of men, and we must turn to the wild if we would follow them. So far as man was concerned he became a sort of living conjecture.

He wrote his name in red across the country-side, but no man saw him, or if they did, 'twas but a whip-like vanishing tail, or a fading tan dot half a mile away that they could not swear to. He became an elusive factor in the scheme of things, a power behind the scenes. Every gamekeeper, every shepherd, every poultry keeper within a radius of twenty miles had to take the "long dog" into consideration each evening when

LONE LUCK

planning the next day's work. In one bound he leaped to fame.

The "long dog" shook the incubus of his collar from his neck with a suggestive ease at 12:15 A. M., upon a night. The chain did not clank as he did so. With a single bound he cleared the wall that encircled the cousin's back-yard, stood for a moment hesitating—a statuesque figure full in the middle of the moonlit village street—and evaporated.

There was in this making off a wonderful mastery of the art of the business. No man saw the going of the "long dog," nor did any hear him. He must have passed by many sleeping house dogs, yet they never saw. Self effacement was almost a science with him, and—though he did not know it—self effacement is one of the rules of life in the wild to which he was going.

Anon he left the road and—like the Spanish smuggler who had committed a murder—took to the mountains.

You picture him a lonely figure, head and tail pointing at the ground, back arched, and

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with a general air of out at heels despondency, breasting the flank of a hill, slouching always with that easy lope which had, though he did not know it, descended to him almost unaltered from the wolves his ancestors. Out of the tail of his eye he noted all things, his ears missed no sound, and what ears and eyes may by miracle have overlooked the tireless nose—gotten of his bulldog grandparent—caught, analyzed, tested, sampled, and mentally noted. Yet to the uneducated eye he appeared about as observant as a child's wooden horse.

It was very still and every little sound magnified itself as it does in a cave. Somewhere from the deep shadow on the edge of a beech-wood came a sound as of beating on palings with a stick, and once a hollow sound, one-third grunt, one-third cough, and the other roar. By these noises one knew there were stags fighting in that wood. Farther on, where the "long dog" skirted a hollow filled like a pond to the brim with purple heather, a thing sat upright and motionless on a tooth of rock and

LONE LUCK

barked at him like a dog, but it was a long-eared owl and it flew away sighing uncannily when he started to investigate.

In a dell he surprised a big dog-fox rolling, dog fashion, in the moonlight, and shortly after as he skirted a forbidding black belt of pines the cathedral silence that reigned among the pillared aisles was shattered by a series of absolutely diabolical yells and screams and moans, sounds so awful that they made one sweat. They followed him, these cries as of lost souls in torment, followed him and encompassed him about, now in front, now in rear, now in flank, now away, now near, and once he turned suddenly and snarled a side-long snarl—you could see the white fangs flash like bared steel in the moonlight—at two ghostly phosphorescent green eyes that peered suddenly at him out of the pine-scented gloom.

Remembering the ghostliness of the scene—black pine cut out against green white moon, in a setting of blue-black, lead gray, pearl where the mist lay, and pure jet hills

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—these noises might have been the war song of ghouls gathering to the feast, but they weren't. The still small voice of fact says they were the remarks of a mother vixen hanging on the heels of the "long dog" and warning her cubs as to the direction of his route. This may have spoiled the illusion, but it is true, and explains the presence of him who rolled in the naked moonlight and the "long dog's" path to draw him away on another scent.

But the "long dog" was attending strictly to business and became interested in a blue shadow gliding down hill in the open. It was a mountain hare and it brought the "long dog" up all standing. For the first time he lifted his drooped head, stared, and —was down the hill. The change from slack slouching to speed incarnate was dramatic as well as startling. It explained, among other things, the whole reason of the "long dog's" existence. Also it changed him in a flash from merely a cur to a poetic embodiment of speed and it caused the vixen, cubs and all, to remove

LONE LUCK

swiftly in the opposite direction without saying a word.

The hare, being a hare and gifted by Nature and her father's kismet with the power to see behind, did not fail of her reputation. She shot away like a blue streak, remembering that she was at a disadvantage on the down grade—as all hares are by reason of their long hind legs—let the “long dog” catch up at full speed, meaning to double in time so as to get on the up grade, and—was ignominiously snapped up.

In drawing from her experience of greyhounds she had overlooked one fact, the greyhound takes his hare flying and in nine cases out of ten is beaten and goes whirling on helplessly at the double. The lurcher does not; he slackens a fraction of a second before the double and comes round as quickly as the hare. This is called “running cunning” in coursing parlance, and a greyhound would be disqualified for so doing, but it fetches the hare all right enough.

Habit of retrieving, and not a fear of any wild foe, caused the dog to pick up the hare

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and break for cover. He even turned and ran a little way back to the village with his capture, so strongly ingrained was the custom of taking all captures to his master. He thought better of it, however, and fed, silently save for the cracking of bones, all alone under the low hanging wholes of the fir.

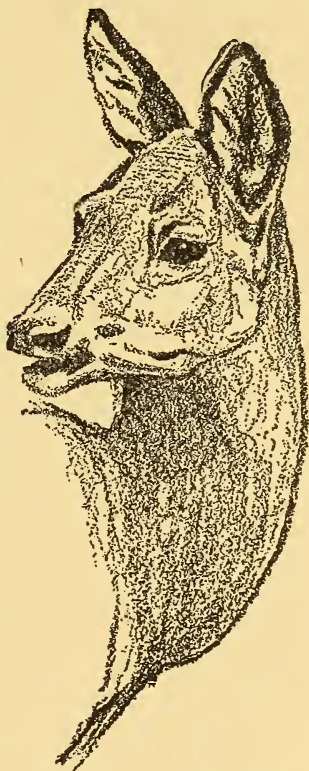
He was still engaged in this, to him, quite new delight—his own master would have flayed him alive for the unpardonable sin of eating his quarry—when the feeling that he was no longer alone seized upon him. They say that one may experience this feeling, the uncanny sensation of being watched by unseen eyes, in most Indian palaces, but those who live in the wild know that there this sensation is always with you. There is no getting away from it; a hundred tiny eyes are forever marking your footsteps, noting your every move. Only, however, when the eyes belong to something big does the feeling become intolerable.

The “long dog” ceased feeding suddenly and—mark the thin line which divided him

LONE LUCK

from the wild folk and had snapped—*without* lifting his head, listened. His muscles became tense—he was ready to bound in every direction at a sound—but he had not lifted his head. He did not show the watcher he was alert, lest that same draw back and fail to disclose itself. In the wild it is the hidden danger that kills. He was looking sideways out of the corners of his eyes. His nose was “working.”

Suddenly he knew that full in the moonlight, not forty yards away, a beast was standing and had moved—had jerked its head round to brush away



THE BEAST WAS A ROE
DEER

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an obtrusive mosquito—and in the moving had changed from a cluster of shadows into a living thing. At first he thought it was a calf, then his nose told him that it was not, and further—this must have been instinct—that it was wild. Now, a wild creature may be hunted, any dog will tell you that.

The “long dog” left his hare and stole forward, and his right fore-paw had not finished its first stride when the thing faded back into the shadows like the vanishing of a puff of smoke. Then he knew it was no calf. Calves have lost the accomplishment—vital in the wild—of moving silently and quickly.

Yet this was a fairly big thing and it had gone away with no more commotion than one would expect from a mouse.

The beast was a roe-deer, though how on earth was the “long dog” to know that he was on one of the most strictly preserved deer forests in Scotland and that outsiders may not hunt roe-deer there?

He dropped his nose and gave chase.

Like the brushing away of a dream all

LONE LUCK

his domestication slid from him. There moved through the delicate silver tracery of moonlight filtering between the boughs, with the true wolf's lope and the silent tread—the "privy paw"—the wild dog hunting his prey.

But if the "long dog" thought to come by this new capture easily he was reckoning without his host. Of all the deer the roe is the most clever. All the craft of all the woods is his, and a complete absence of panic, so different from all his clan. From first to last the "long dog" never really saw the quarry, unless a transient gleam, as the flicker of a fading lamp whisked between the gnarled boles, which marked the passing of the deer's light rump, or the falling back of low boughs after the passage of something which had gone before, could be rightly called seeing.

He had never been beaten by anything to the trail of which he had set his nose before, our "long dog," but at the end of an hour when he came back, led by the trail of the elusive roe, for the third time to the place

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whence he started, he came to the conclusion that he was being made a fool of and had best give it up. This he did, for all dogs hate being laughed at.

As if this was not enough, he found that the foxes had finished what he had left—more than two-thirds—of his hare, and if he wished for more to eat before to-morrow night he must go catch it. He knew better than to hunt by day; had, in fact, always been trained for night work by the gentleman of the “barrer,” his first owner.

Yet it must have been fate that led him to the foot of a gaunt hill pimpled with boulders—all loose—and scrub of the scrubbiest and ordained that in rounding a boulder not much larger than a house he should come smack upon not more than half a dozen hinds, red deer hinds, as big as donkeys, feeding and lying down.

After the first start the whole group seemed, as it were, to be in suspension by this sudden lean fawn apparition out of the night. Then there was a snort, a rush, a swift shuffling of large forms in the half

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A STAG CLIMBING SLOWLY
UP THE SLOPE

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light, and the rest was a clatter of loose stones receding momentarily far up the hillside.

Borne by an impulse to do he knew not what the "long dog" sprang forward, shot clean up in the air, and landed upon the exact spot whence he had started. He had changed his mind at the last moment.

Something was coming up the hillside.

"The "long dog," still standing like a statue where he had landed, slowly turned his head. Then he was still. The pale, green-white radiance of the room, lighting and yet not lighting anything properly, cutting the shadows of boulder, bush, stone, stick, and even blade of grass in clean carved patterns of jet, showed the great, gaunt, red form of a stag climbing slowly up the slope.

The huge, branched and gnarled antlers—their points shining white as ivory—weaved slowly from side to side as he swung his head with that rhythm of gait peculiar to deer; his mane stood out in a bristling ruff; his eyes gleamed red beneath the

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shadow of his weapons, and he picked his way, for all his eighteen stone or more in weight, lightly and daintily as any fairy that ever trod and with the infinite grace in every pose which is the peculiar heritage of all the deer. He was a fourteen pointer, and perhaps the grandest stag in half a kingdom at that moment. Many, courtiers and kings, would have given much gold to bring him low. But the "long dog" saw in him only prey, or perhaps an enemy—the one is so often likely at any moment to become the other in the wild.

Another stag roared suddenly in a glen opposite, and he of the huge head turned swiftly to hurl out a rasping, grunting, deep reverberating challenge. A single young hind broke back from the herd not far above and cantered down toward the stag that had roared first. The big fellow plunged forward as if to stop her, but pulled up short in his tracks with a snort of alarm, as answering snorts sounded from above and the glen below.

A long swift shadow was gliding, fast as

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the shadow of a hurrying cloud glides, straight toward the young hind. It was the "long dog," stretched at full gallop, silent and ominous.

The hind, bent on flirting against the wishes of her lord, heard the snorts and stopped with a pretty toss of her silken muzzle, wilful and rebellious. She knew the warning of the snorts, was aware of the danger "shouted" to her almost as plainly as words could speak from the harem above, her lord, and the new lover below together; knew she, and heard she, but she would not go back.

A second snort—shrill and whistling this time—and snort after snort from above and below; a clatter of stones; a splash as flying hoofs spurned a pool; a confusion among the shadows above and below, and rebellion gave place to fear—she was alone.

No, not alone. What was that which raced toward her down the hill, raced as the shadow of a hawk races on the doomed bird? She started. The moon had gleamed on teeth, fangs bared for action as a sword is

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bared. She flung half round, glanced back, trembled, snorted, and fled.

After the first grand bound—which was about eight feet high and ten long—the hind settled down into a swift gallop, a gallop little, if anything, slower than that of a hare at its quickest. By what miracle she avoided slipping down a dozen times on the treacherous shale, or kept from pitching forward and spoiling her dainty nose as boulder after boulder turned under her flying hoofs, I know not, but she did.

At the end of ten minutes she had not slackened speed one iota, but the “long dog” saw that she was altering her course. This had at first been down hill, then along it, then slightly uphill. She was, in fact, making a long sweep, intending to rejoin her herd, which was presumably somewhere over the other side of the ridge.

Suddenly, as she breasted the slope, she gave a great bound. The drumming of her foe’s feet came plainly to her backward-turned ears. The foe was nearer than before, had, in fact, pouched half her start by

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taking an inner circle, and she had made a mistake. In the wild there is no room for mistakes; he who makes one may live, he may even survive a second, but never a third. Indeed few live even to risk a third.

The hind now ran for her life. She had no further hope of rejoining the herd. Water was her only chance, and she made for it, over that infernally rough ground, at a speed that was at once magnificent and terrifying. Still the long shadow glided swiftly in her wake. In its course was no slackening nor quickening. It was just a steady rapid glide, straight as an arrow, silent as death, purposeful as fate.

Between that and the coming to the lake lay an interval of uncounted time, a gap of blind and dizzy speed, an everlasting stream of landscape and things sliding past; of a flock of amazed sheep blundering up at their feet and scattering all whither bleatingly; of the badger at business with roots that fell sideways grunting strange oaths; of the wild-cat under a heather-tuft at business with something much less innocent than

LONE LUCK

roots, which shot up like a fury through a trap, spitting and swearing worse oaths; of the red bull standing alone in thought that they both ran into round a cliff-corner and over whose back the hind leaped clean, while the "long dog" shot—his heart in his mouth—under the bovine belly, and lastly of the ominous crouching human figure under a shattered Scotch pine loaded with nets and grouse—all these things whirled past them like pictures seen on a cinematograph.

And then, below, in front, the lap, lap, lap of the waters of the lake, and the glitter of them in the moonlight. Not a hundred yards away was the lake, and the "long dog" was thirty yards behind. At his present rate of gaining on the quarry there was not half an atom of a chance of his reaching her. Once in the water that much chance vanished also.

Then did the "long dog" show of what stuff he was made. A few lurchers have the trick, not many. It is to pursue for hours and not show their real speed; to hold a reserve till the psychological moment. He

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judged that to have arrived. Without a sound still and without warning, he "drew" up to the quarry for all the world as if he had been wound in on a string. Followed a gleam of fangs, a rush, a snort, a scurry, a burst and whirl of dust, a tangle of red and tan bodies, a flail-like kicking, and the two parted.

For a moment the "long dog" appeared, whirling and circling like a red Indian, round the deer, now on the defensive and her haunches. Then the tangle renewed itself, and the moon mercifully sank and plunged all things in a treble-welted darkness, and the quick, blanketing Scotch mist swept down and completed the obscurity.

Dawn found a keeper standing over the carcass of a hind on the shore of the lake. His clenched fists were raised to Heaven, but the words which fell from his lips were anything but Heavenly. The rocky ground gave no sign of the footsteps, or the nature of the murderer, but a small portion of the murdered one had been eaten, and it is said that ten collie dogs vanished mysteriously

LONE LUCK

that week—how the keeper alone knows—because of it.

During the day the “long dog’s” dreams in the heart of a sea of heather were broken from time to time by the vicious slapping reports of the deerstalkers’ rifles. He lay low and took notes, one of which was that the range of firearms, which he had always been taught to believe was around forty yards, had miraculously quadrupled itself at the very least. He also marked the course of a wounded stag, and when dusk had fallen and the bats had begun to weave patterns across the near sky and a single nightjar was flapping slowly to and fro, he stole out.

Across an open space washed in the purple of heather he took his way and down to a hollow where he plunged from the light of evening into the cool gray-green shade of bog-myrtle whose scent rose all about him like lavender, where deeper still the rank grass parted with a soft sweeping of my lady’s skirt, and the tall feathery plumes of the cotton grass waved stately above him,

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marking his course to the eyes of a watchful buzzard, wheeling, eagle-like, on great still wings, who once before that day had dined from the "long dog's" bounty, and took a last look at his course ere going to rest on some dizzy fastness of the higher mountains. But the "long dog" was after water and found it anon in this low soft place. Truly, there was the lake, but gentlemen of the night do not drink openly on the unsheltered shore of any lake when rifles are abroad and the sun still flings blood-red stains across the glassy depths.

The "long dog" here wallowed neck deep in water, drinking full, and afterwards, by rolling in the deep green tussocks of deer grass, scoured his coat as though it had been gone over with a wire-brush. He was but marking time while the day passed, and not till the last ring ouzel had gone to roost and the last azure dragon fly had darted athwart the shallows like some jewelled arrow fired from a fairy bow invisible, and the first long-drawn notes of an owl gave the night call that should awaken all the banned, the out-

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laws from their lairs, did he move from the gloom among the bog myrtles. Then up he came through the delicate pink haze of the cross-leaved heather, to firmer ground where he plunged by one of the innumerable game-paths into the rolling sea of purple that marked the beginning of the true heather and the high moors.

Nothing, I think, was in his mind then of specially evil import, for he spent the night coursing hares—the finicking, limping, blue hares of the mountains—and caught two, one of which he ate. He also investigated the higher slopes and discovered a new world, a world of clouds, air refined and intoxicating as champagne, of ptarmigan and raven among other things, and a rocky desolation, dangerous and of forbidding aspect, where an outlaw might retire when things looked very black.

Before dawn he had returned to his lair of the previous day, but got little rest by reason of the deer stalkers. There is, to an outlaw, no joy in waking to the smacking report of a Mauser sporting magazine rifle,

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

or the deeper, shorter cough of the .450 Express, and the remarks of a bullet all alone and singing in a high key to itself as it comes sailing down over the purple sea of heather, from God and he who pressed the trigger alone knows where, are scarcely calculated to improve sleep.

Like the fox of the fable, our "long dog" slept with one eye open, and it did not require the crash of a nineteen-stone stricken stag, falling in the heather not fifty yards away, to bring him to a state of nerve tension and alertness calculated to strain the most equable temper. He shifted his station three times that day within a radius of a heather patch of ten acres, because of men and deer and once a collie tracking deer, who nevertheless nearly gave him away.

That evening as the lurcher slouched down through the bog myrtles it was far too dark for shooting. The owls had been out some time, the bats, those that did not remain on the wing all night, were already returning to "hang up," a fox and a pole-cat had already gone to the same place to drink

LONE LUCK

and had come away, and the badger, the last of the outlaws to sally on foray, had already slid by, a long, gray, grunting shadow, down the hill, and:

“Night busy at her dawn
Begins it with a star.”

There was no lingering in the damp place to-night. The “long dog” had a purpose. A hasty drink and toilet, with the luxurious roll cut out, sufficed. He slouched off by the path taken by all the outlaws, or at any rate most of them, not uphill this time, but down. Down in this land meant man and civilization; up, the wild and desolation.

He hurried, the “long dog” hurried. He slouched indeed, but it was a quick slouch. You picture him, two green eyes—seen only at certain angles—and a pattering sound hurrying through the gloom, which, unless he got on a sky-line, covered the rest of him.

Down he went below the last outposts of the heather; down through hazy patches of palm sallow and herb willow; down through

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woods of ranked and serried larch; and so to columned beach and billowy oak—where he saw groups of fox-gloves gleaming palely, and once a ghostly white upright form that was, though he cared not, a white fox-glove. At length all gave place to common, tufted with prickly gorse, eaten bare as a lawn by—sheep. There they were, half seen, half guessed in the blackness. Not that the “long dog” needed sight, the sweet sickly smell and the sound as of a multitude breathing were enough for him.

I like to believe that there was in him then no real thought of doing evil; that he was merely hunting as he had been trained to hunt; that, in fact, he had no thought of coming back to that spot again. Certainly he passed on as if that business were his one idea.

He came to a farm.

By devious paths and with much caution—not, by the way, apparent—he encircled that farm. He tested the wind from every quarter, and finding taint of neither man nor dog, entered.

LONE LUCK

It was an orchard.

Heavy on the air hung the sweet scent of apples, but he had not come for anything so innocent as apples. There were, just where the orchard gave on a rick-yard, small houses, and the scent around them, though heavy, was anything but sweet. They were small. Fowls lived there. These, also, he left alone for the very good reason that they were shut up.

Further investigation of the farm revealed two cows, a calf, a cat, and a pig, and then he happened on a great find.

In a quiet place, high out of ordinary harm's way, were wired-in hutches, and in these were cockerels fattening. I say "were" advisedly, because the leap of the "long dog" was very high indeed, and when he left that place, which he did suddenly and hurriedly, one of those cockerels went, entirely without joy, with him. He had, in the vernacular, "landed a red 'un," and him, when he had put half a mile between his own lean body and the farm, he consumed with great gusto.

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But another dog, big and not by any means lean, came after him from the farm, hot foot on his track. He was a great dog and savage, larger and heavier than the "long dog," and he meant murder.

It was a grand fight. At least, I imagine it was, for there was no light to view it by, and it lasted three minutes. In the end the "long dog" went away, and the farmer found the mangled remains of the other next day.

The "long dog," urged by the experience of previous fights no doubt, hurried away at a rapid lope, but fate was unkind, I think, in ordaining that his path should take him clean through the scattered flock of sheep, which, as you will remember, he had encountered earlier in the night. I don't know whether it was the temper consequent on his several wounds—which hurt abominably—or the sudden excitement caused by woolly bodies stampeding about him in the dark, or some sudden awakening of the old wild hatred of the truly wild carnivora for all domesticated animals. Who indeed

LONE LUCK

shall say? Anyway, the result was the same; the "long dog" forgot himself.

It is written that he who slays domestic birds in Britain commits a theft, but he who slays domestic beasts in the same fashion had safer have killed their owner. Time was when the killing of another man's sheep was punishable by death. To-day the penalty has been shifted to the wild folk. All the country-side stands up on its hind legs and raves if a sheep is killed. And the "long dog," I regret to say, killed several. Mercifully the darkness hid the horror of the "worry," but the shepherd found a reeking slaughter-pen next morning, for, as generally happens in such cases, the "long dog" had for the time being gone clean mad with the lust of slaughter.

The sun, golden, wide-eyed, and splendid, shot warm bars as it rose, down through the tangled heather by the lake next day and discovered the "long dog" asleep in his lair, but that was the last day he spent there. Next night the murder of sheep was reported from another quarter, and the night

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after three fat ducks, which had been shut up carefully on a hill-farm in the evening, had vanished into nowhere by the morning. A turkey, another fowl, a kid, and a wounded stag met a like fate during the next week or so, and men awoke to the fact that there was something among them, not foxes, which ought to be killed.

They thought it was more than one beast, owing to the "long dog's" crafty habit of doing his killing, say ten miles south of his lair on one night, and a dozen north of it the next. He made forays to every point of the compass, but always in an opposite direction each night. Many keepers and farmers spent much money on poison to worry his innards, but he had long ago learned the wolf's scarcely edifying but most effective method of getting rid of poison. Hours also were spent in setting traps to entertain him, but he had poached in woods bristling with traps all his checkered life—he could *smell* steel.

As for lying in wait for him with guns as some did, it was pathetic; where he came from keepers swarmed and the work of

LONE LUCK

avoiding them had been brought to a fine art. No, our "long dog" was above all these things. In fact, it is not too much to say that he ceased to be a poaching thief and became a picturesque bandit.

One night he had been out late and was still a mile from home when suddenly the night died and rocks and things began to stand out of the darkness receding. The sky paled. The little matter of three fowls in a distant farm and of the settling of a blood feud with a collie who had been set to guard the lives of sheep, but failed to guard his own, had delayed him somewhat.

The "long dog" hurried.

Day rushed on, striding from hill-top to hill-top; an eagle launched from some summit above the cliffs and started his aerial patrol; a kite awoke and sailed sublime in the new, raw light, and with a rush—almost an audible clash—a spear of fire shot out from the east, a blinding torrent of red and gold followed, and before he knew it our "long dog" found himself bathed in sunshine.

He broke into a gallop.

PEOPLE OF THE WILD

Phtt!

A bullet—a copper-capped, .318, accelerated magazine rifle bullet—spat dirt into his eyes. It had come without warning, without a sign, and its own report followed. That alone saved the “long dog.” It told him which way to fly from the death he could not see, and the man who, lying by a rocky pool waiting for a stag to drink at dawn, could lob a bullet seven hundred yards. That man was probably the best shot in the Highlands, but the “long dog” was probably the swiftest runner. He became a tan streak drawn across the landscape and moved from one valley into another. I dare not give you the infinitesimal fraction of time occupied in that moving.

Still, though he escaped, it was a bad business. It fixed his identity. It made him known. From a rumor he became a tangible dog. His foes knew the appearance of this living calamity, and he was forced to shift his lair to the desolation of the upper mountains in consequence.

I like to think of him alone up there with

LONE LUCK

only the eagles and the ravens and the ptarmigan for company, and of how he grandly swooped down upon the valleys and took his toll night after night and week after week, but especially I like to think of the end and to know that it was not altogether ignoble or unworthy.

A stag roared on the hillside. A challenge came from the valley, and the stag went down roaring. A rifle barked in the valley, and the stag came up the hillside through the suddenly swooping hill. These things the "long dog," peering from a cave, beheld, and when the light became too bad for shooting he went and sniffed at the antlered monarch's trail.

Then he dropped his nose and slid away on the line of scent—not indeed exactly on it for the wind had blown it quite fifty yards to one side of the real path taken by the stag, but still it was near enough to hunt by. To-night man and his creatures should rest, he would hunt royal game like a very king, forgetting that a king's privilege is to be slain as well as to slay. .

PEOPLE OF THE WILD



ALONE UP THERE WITH ONLY THE EAGLES AND
RAVENS

LONE LUCK

The stag had breasted the crest and taken down the opposite slope. When, however, he discovered—he alone knows how—that a new death was on his trail he again turned uphill, as a stag wounded in the forequarters invariably and naturally will. Two hours after the start, an evil, spitting wild cat beheld a wounded stag, brown with sweat, galloping slowly round the shoulder of a hill. Blood had dried on his chest, and he was lame in the right foreleg, but his wound was apparently more painful than deadly. He looked neither to the right nor left, but passed straight on. Fifteen minutes later the same cat saw following the same path the loose, slouching form of the “long dog.” He, too, was chocolate-colored with sweat, and he, too, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but passed on over the shoulder at his tireless gallop—a form as determined and implacable as fate itself.

Four hours from the start one of those large gray foxes that haunt the heights stood aside for a moment from his path to let by a big, raking stag, head down, tongue

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out, bloodshot eyed, who moved at little more than a walk up hill and staggered drunkenly on over the brow. Four hours and ten minutes from the start the same fox was amazed to see a slouching, raking dog, head down, tongue lolling, plastered with dirt, red-eyed, stumbling blindly along on the same path at a slow, lame canter. He too tottered over the brow and disappeared, and on his face was a look of determination that suggested he would continue to hunt that stag till the crack of doom.

Seven hours and ten minutes from the start, in the raw light of naked dawn, a gamekeeper, who had come there to wait for a fox returning to his den, was frozen with stupefaction at sight of a drenched "royal" stag and a drenched lurcher dog lying together on the brink of a mountain pool. There in the stark light the tragedy was revealed of two beasts whom no man had slain, whom no wound had killed; the superbly dogged hunter, and the doggedly superb hunted side by side, at full length, grand specimens of their race, masterpieces of

LONE LUCK

nature in the being—dead. Dead? How? Their hearts had burst.

Then as the keeper turned away, from a gaunt up-flung fang of rock, cut as in the very coal against the raw blood-red of flaming sunrise, a raven croaked:

“Nevermore!”

It was the end.

END

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